The *Iliad* of Homer

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Dr. Vandiver is married to Franklin J. Hildy, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Theatre, at the University of Maryland.
This course is dedicated to the memory of
Gareth Morgan,
teacher of Greek, lover of Homer.
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**The Iliad of Homer**

**Scope:**

This set of twelve lectures introduces the student to the first of the two great epics of ancient Greece, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. During the course, the student should read the *Iliad* in its entirety to gain the maximum benefit and enjoyment from the lectures, which provide careful, detailed examinations of the most important episodes, address various critical and interpretative issues, and give background information on the cultural assumptions contained in the *Iliad*.

The first lecture sets the stage for our reading of the *Iliad* (and, subsequently, the *Odyssey*) by providing an introduction to the plan of the course and summarizing the mythological background assumed by the Greek epics. The second lecture addresses the question of the 400- to 500-year gap between the events described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and the time when they were written down. It describes the epics’ relationship to traditional orally transmitted poetry, and considers the implications of that oral tradition for the question of who “Homer” was.

Lectures Three through Twelve address the plot, characters, and interpretations of the *Iliad* itself. Each of these lectures focuses on a particular scene, character, or theme as we read through the *Iliad*. Lecture Three introduces the cultural concepts of *kleos* (glory) and *timê* (honor) and explains their significance for understanding the wrath of Achilles. Lecture Four moves inside the walls of Troy to discuss Homer’s presentation of the Trojans as sympathetic characters, not as stereotypical enemies. In Lecture Five, we look in detail at Book IX of the *Iliad*, where three of Achilles’ comrades try to persuade him to return to battle; we discuss how the concepts of *kleos* and *timê* factor into his refusal to do so. The concept of *kleos* is given a fuller discussion in Lecture Six, which demonstrates that it is one of the key elements in the *Iliad*’s examination of the human condition. In Lecture Seven, we turn to examining the gods in Homer, discussing what types of beings they are and what their presence in the narrative adds to the *Iliad*. Lectures Eight and Nine give a detailed reading of the most important events of the day of Hektor’s glory and Patroklos’ death, the *Iliad*’s longest day, which lasts from Book XI through Book XVIII; Lecture Eight focuses on Hektor and Lecture Nine, on Patroklos. Achilles’ return to battle is covered in Lecture Ten, which discusses the implications of his actions, his divinely made armor, and his refusal to bury the dead Patroklos. Lecture Eleven examines Hektor and Achilles together, highlighting the contrasting elements in their characters and the inevitability of their final encounter in battle. Finally, in Lecture Twelve, we discuss the resolution of the *Iliad*, which is brought about by Achilles’ encounter with his dead enemy, Hektor’s aged father, King Priam. Throughout these lectures, we will visit again and again the overriding theme of what it means to be human and what the *Iliad* has to say about the human condition.
Lecture One
Introduction to Homeric Epic

Scope: This first lecture introduces students to the overall plan of the course. The lecture falls into three main sections. The first of these discusses why the Homeric epics are still worth reading, nearly 3,000 years after their creation. In this section, we consider definitions of the term “epic,” the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*’s place in literary history, and possible reasons why they have remained popular for so long. The second section outlines and explains the course’s format and approach; lectures will include some plot synopsis, discussion of the epics’ cultural background, and examination of larger issues raised by the epics. The third section gives a brief overview of the story of the Trojan War, which is the crucial narrative background of the Homeric epics.

Outline

I. This introductory lecture has three main objects.
   A. The lecture begins by discussing what the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are, and why they still worth reading, nearly 3,000 years after their creation.
   B. The second section of the lecture outlines the approach and overall shape of the course.
   C. The lecture concludes with a brief summary of the story of the Trojan War, the narrative background for the epics.

II. What are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and why should modern readers spend time on them?
   A. These two poems are the earliest literary works in the European tradition, although they represent the culmination of a centuries-long tradition of orally transmitted poetry.
   B. They are the first fully developed epics in Western culture.
      1. By “epic,” the Greeks simply meant any long poem in one particular meter, dactylic hexameter.
      2. Because of Greece’s influence on later Western culture, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* served as models for later epic. The term “epic” thus came to mean narrative poems dealing with gods and heroes, and often associated with either war or adventure.
   C. The Homeric epics were primary cultural texts for classical Greek civilization.
      1. They served as educational tools, as moral frameworks, provided examples of proper and improper behavior. They codify information about the value system of ancient Greek culture.

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2. They provide the fullest accounts we have of several episodes from the Trojan War myth, one of the most important and pervasive myths of Greek, Roman, and later Western civilization.

D. Why should modern readers spend time on these ancient works? There are two obvious answers. First, these epics have survived because they have continued to speak to readers throughout the ages. In addition, they have exercised an enormous influence on later literature.

1. The epics are much more than merely narratives about war (the *Iliad*) or adventure and homecoming (the *Odyssey*). They both look deep into the heart of what it means to be human.

2. The very fact the Homeric epics continue to seem compelling to us is in itself evidence of their influence. We find them compelling in part because so much of our later literary tradition derives ultimately from them.

3. Their influence on later literature is incalculable; apart from these epics, only the Bible has exercised so profound an influence on later Western culture. Unlike the Bible, however, the Greek epics were not sacred texts.

E. At the same time that they remain compelling and familiar, the society described in the epics is also alien to us in many ways: it is patriarchal, slave-holding, monarchical, polytheistic. They are thus both familiar and strange, both close and remote.

III. These lectures will concentrate on careful, detailed examinations of the two epics. We cannot discuss every episode of both epics, but we will attempt to touch on the highlights of each, especially on those scenes that bring out wider thematic issues. Accordingly, the lectures approach the epics from three angles.

A. Most lectures will include some synopsis of the relevant section’s plot.

1. Lectures Two, Thirteen, and Twenty-Four are exceptions since they discuss material outside the actual epics.

2. Each lecture’s “Essential Reading” will be taken from the epics themselves. Thus, by the end of the course the student will have read the entire *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

B. When necessary, the lectures will also discuss the cultural background and assumptions of the specific scenes under discussion.

C. Finally, the lectures will address the larger issues being dealt with by the epics: the deeper content for which plot and cultural assumptions are the vehicle.
IV. Before beginning our reading of the epics themselves, we need to cover two types of background information. In this lecture, we will examine the mythic background of the two epics. The next lecture will discuss the poetic background of the epics and the question of when and how they were composed.

A. The mythic background of the poems is the story of the Trojan War, the most famous legend in ancient literature.
1. This story of a great war between a Greek expeditionary force and the people of Troy provided narrative material not only for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but for many Greek tragedies, for Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and for countless later works.
2. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* do not tell the entire story of the war. The *Iliad* focuses on events that happened during a short period in the last year of the war, and the *Odyssey* deals with the hero Odysseus’ further adventures after the war.
3. These two epics were not the only ones to deal with the Trojan War, although they were recognized in antiquity as the greatest epics. There were other epic poems, now lost, that told the rest of the story of the Trojan War.

B. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* clearly allude to various episodes of the Trojan War that are not part of their own narrative framework. In other words, these two epics assume that their audience is familiar with the following basic elements of the whole story:
1. The most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, daughter of the great god Zeus and wife of the Greek Menelaos, was abducted by the Trojan prince Paris.
2. Under the command of Menelaos’ elder brother Agamemnon, the Greeks mustered an army to go to Troy and fight for Helen’s return.
3. The war against Troy lasted for 10 years. The fighting was fairly evenly balanced, with each side having its foremost warrior (Achilles for the Greeks, Hektor for the Trojans).
4. Achilles was the son of a goddess mother, Thetis, and a human father, Peleus. Their wedding was arranged by Zeus, and Thetis was not entirely willing.
5. The greatest Trojan warrior, Hektor, was killed by the greatest Greek warrior, Achilles, who was himself killed by Paris.
6. Finally, the Greeks resorted to trickery. Using the famous ruse of the Trojan Horse, invented by Odysseus, they infiltrated the walled city of Troy and sacked it by night.
7. The Greeks committed many outrages against the Trojans during the Sack of Troy. Foremost among these were the killing of King Priam at his household altar, the murder of Hektor’s baby son Astyanax by throwing him from the city walls, and the rape of
Priam’s daughter Kassandra in the temple of the virgin goddess Athena.

8. These outrages angered the gods, leading to many hardships for the surviving Greeks on their way home. Most importantly, Agamemnon was killed by his wife and her lover when he arrived home, and Odysseus spent 10 years wandering on his way from Troy.

C. There are some famous details of the legend that are not clearly alluded to by Homer, and even some that are clearly excluded.

1. Most scholars think that the Iliad alludes to the famous “Judgment of Paris,” but this remains uncertain.

2. The story that Achilles was invulnerable except for his heel is definitely not assumed in the Iliad.

D. In the next lecture, we will consider how these poems came to be created.

Supplementary Reading:

Timothy Gantz, Early Greek Myth, Volume 2, Chapter 16. A very detailed account, listing all the ancient sources for each detail of the legend.

Susan Woodford, Trojan War in Art, Chapters 1–2. A simple, easily readable account of the background events.

Questions to Consider:

1. Myths such as the story of the Trojan War, which “everyone knew,” provided a stock of common reference points against which the Greeks could map their everyday experiences, frame moral questions, and so on. Does modern American culture have any similar set of common reference points?

2. The Homeric epics use the stories they tell to meditate on great over-reaching themes, such as the nature of mortality. Can the same be said of all great literature? Put another way, can a story told simply for the sake of the story qualify as “literature”? 
Lecture Two
The Homeric Question

Scope: In this lecture, we consider how the Homeric epics were created and what their function was in their own society. The lecture traces the historical background of the “Homeric Question”: Are the Iliad and Odyssey the works of one creative genius, or are they conglomerations of shorter poems? We then move on to examine the evidence that the epics were grounded in a tradition of oral (as opposed to written) composition, and discuss the implications this has for their creation and for the very existence of “Homer.”

Outline

I. Although the events described in the Iliad and the Odyssey supposedly took place in the 12th century BC, the alphabet was not introduced into Greece until the 8th century BC. How, when, and why did these epics come to be created? Who was Homer?
   A. The Greeks of the classical period did not doubt the historicity of either the Trojan War or of Homer himself. They assumed that the Sack of Troy occurred in 1184 BC, and that the epics had been composed by one poet.
   B. As early as the 2nd century AD, scholars had begun to question whether the Iliad and the Odyssey were written by the same poet, or even by one poet at all. There are some internal inconsistencies in the works that lead to doubts.
   C. In 1795, F. A. Wolf published a book suggesting that Homer had been an illiterate bard, who composed in the 10th century BC, and that his epics were then transmitted orally, by memory, until the 6th century.
   D. This question, of whether or not the Iliad and the Odyssey are unified wholes created by one supreme poetic genius, is often called “The Homeric Question.” In the 19th century, it was the topic of heated debate, with two main camps.
      1. The “Unitarians” argued that each epic was the result of poetic composition by a single author, although some of them posited two authors, one per epic.
      2. The “Analysts” or “Separatists” argued that the poems could be analyzed into original shorter songs, and thus were compilations, not unified works.
II. In 1928, the American scholar Milman Parry published his research demonstrating that the epics bore many signs of being products of an ongoing oral tradition, rather than of one individual’s creative genius.

A. Parry’s most important contribution to Homeric scholarship was his definition and discussion of formulas.
   1. Parry defined a formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.”
   2. The meter of the Homeric epics is dactylic hexameter. This meter is cumbersome in English, but very flexible in Greek.
   3. A formula often consists of a name plus an epithet, but it can also be a phrase or even a whole line of verse.
   4. Parry demonstrated that Homer’s formulas exhibit “thrift”; that is, different ways to refer to a particular character or concept will not occupy the same metrical position.
   5. The implication of this is that a bard, in performance, will have one and only one way of expressing a given idea in any given metrical position.

B. Parry’s theory of oral composition also helps to explain two other notable features of the Homeric epics, the “type scenes” and the oddities of the dialect used in the poems.
   1. Type scenes are descriptions of feasting, arming, etc., that are repeated in different sections of the epic with only minor variations.
   2. Homeric dialect included variations from standard Greek forms and many archaisms.

C. Parry and his pupil Albert Lord studied the poetic practice of illiterate South Slavic bards, or guzlars, working in an oral tradition.
   1. Formulas, type scenes, and so on served as building blocks with which the Slavic bard could organize his material in performance. He thus recreated his poem in a different version each time he performed it, rather than memorizing it word for word.
   2. Parry and Lord argued that the Homeric epics had been composed in a similar fashion.
   3. The Serbian bards’ poems were much shorter than the Iliad and the Odyssey, but Parry and Lord remained certain that the Homeric epics were products of oral composition.

D. Thus, these first works of Western literature were not originally “literature” at all. They were performance pieces, recreated each time a bard sang them.

E. The circumstances of the epics’ performance cannot be known with certainty. However, it seems quite plausible that they were designed to be performed over three- or four-day periods at religious festivals.
III. Parry’s demonstration that the Homeric epics are grounded in traditional oral composition is almost universally accepted by modern scholars. However, scholars disagree on the implications of that fact for our understanding of the epics’ genesis.

A. Some scholars think that there was never any one poet who can meaningfully be called Homer. The epics as we have them simply represent one version, from one performance of traditional material, which became canonized through writing but was never the creation of one poet.

B. Others think that the epics show a sophistication and complexity of design that must indicate careful structuring by a single poet, albeit a poet working within the oral tradition.

C. Thus, Parry’s work did not put an end to the old quarrel between Unitarians and Analysts; it simply recast it in somewhat different terms.

IV. There is little consensus of opinion about how, when, and why the epics came to be written down.

A. There is no absolute agreement about the date at which the alphabet was introduced into Greece.
   1. The majority opinion is that the alphabet was introduced into Greece some time in the 8th century BC.
   2. Some scholars suggest that the introduction came much earlier, and some that it was even later.

B. There is no absolute agreement about how long after the alphabet’s introduction the epics were written down.
   1. Most scholars think that there must have been a lapse of several decades, at least, between the introduction of the alphabet and the transcription of the Homeric epics.
   2. A few scholars think, on the contrary, that the alphabet was adapted to the Greek language specifically in order to transcribe these epics.

C. There is no absolute agreement about who wrote them down, or how, or why.
   1. Some scholars assume our versions of the epics are “oral dictated texts,” but others have difficulty imagining a workable process of dictation.
   2. Some scholars think that a bard working in the oral tradition learned to write specifically to transcribe these epics, but comparative study of modern oral bards makes this seem highly unlikely.
   3. Others posit a compromise position, in which a completely illiterate Homer composed the Iliad and the Odyssey, and his
creations were then transmitted orally, being memorized word for word by his successors, until writing had become well established.

4. The exact process of transcription will probably remain unknown.

D. There is an ancient tradition that the Athenian tyrant Peisistratos commissioned a fixed text of the epics in Athens in the 6th century BC.

E. The texts were further regularized from the 5th to 2nd centuries BC.
   1. The great Alexandrian scholars of the 3rd and 2nd centuries began the tradition of Homeric scholarship and textual criticism.
   2. It is at this time, probably, that the standard divisions of each epic into 24 “books” developed.

V. For simplicity’s sake, throughout this course I will refer to “Homer” or “the bard” as though there were such a poet, the author of the epics.
   A. My overall approach will be far closer to the Unitarian than to the Analytical.
   B. I assume that the epics show rich characterization, detailed correspondence backward and forward in plot line, and intricate structure, all elements of design which point to a “designer.”
   C. However, students should remember that many Homer scholars disagree vehemently with these assumptions.

Supplementary Reading:

Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon*, Chapter 1, clearly lays out Parry’s concept of the formula, and then argues strongly against assuming that the presence of formulas precludes belief in an individual genius-poet. This chapter contains a good bit of untranslated Greek, but the argumentation is clear without knowledge of Greek.


Barry Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet*.

Oliver Taplin, *Homeric Soundings*, Chapter 1. This chapter discusses the possibility that the *Iliad* was composed in a tripartite structure, for performance over three days (or nights).

F. A. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer*.
Questions to Consider:

1. Many modern “Unitarians” find something very disturbing in the idea that there was no “Homer,” no actual author of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Do you think it makes a difference in our appreciation of these epics if they were the culmination of a tradition rather than the work of an individual genius?

2. Some modern scholars reject the “compromise” position outlined in IV.C.3 above, because they think it is impossible that anyone could remember, word for word, a text as long as the Iliad. Can you think of any modern analogues for such a feat of memory? Conversely, can you think of any modern types of performance that resemble the “oral composition” model suggested by Parry and Lord?
Scope: In this lecture, we begin looking at the *Iliad* itself. The lecture discusses the epic’s *in medias res* beginning, and how the opening scenes identify the primary subject matter of the poem from the very beginning. On the simplest level, the *Iliad* is about the wrath of Achilles; on a more complex level, this anger is the narrative device by which the bard can discuss wider themes, among them mortality, the human condition, and how the warrior ethos affects what it means to be human. Since Achilles’ anger and its implications can only be properly understood in the context of its own cultural background, the lecture examines and defines the key concepts of *timê* (honor) and *kleos* (fame/glory), which will be crucial throughout our reading of the *Iliad*.

Outline

I. The *Iliad* begins *in medias res*: “in the middle of the subject.”
   A. A bard working with traditional material could assume that his audience knew the story and the characters, and so could pick the narrative up at any point.
   B. The *Iliad* is not the story of the whole war; it addresses one episode in the last year of that war.
      1. Achilles’ own death is not shown in the *Iliad*.
      2. The Trojan Horse and the Sack of Troy do not occur in the *Iliad*.
      3. However, the bard does frequently allude to these (and other) important events from other parts of the story.
      4. On the most basic level, the *Iliad*’s subject is the wrath (Greek *mênis*) of Achilles, which motivates him to withdraw from the fighting, leaving his fellow Greeks to suffer great losses to the Trojans. The word used for Achilles’ wrath is normally used only in reference to the gods.

II. Starting his narrative with this particular episode, the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon, allows the bard to focus on crucial themes that bear on the entire warrior ethos.

III. Achilles is angry because Agamemnon took away his concubine Briseis. To understand the nature of Achilles’ anger, we must examine the Homeric hero’s motivations for fighting in the first place.
   A. The Homeric warrior fights for honor (*timê*) and glory or fame (*kleos*).
      1. *Timê* is often translated “honor.” However, its most basic meaning is the tangible, physical expression of honor in the form of booty, gifts, or a particular prize (*geras*).
2. *Kleos* can be translated as “glory” or “fame.” In its most basic sense, *kleos* means “what other people say about you,” what is spoken aloud about you.

B. *Timê* and *kleos* are closely related; one’s *kleos* depends to a large extent on the *timê* offered by one’s peers. But *kleos* also serves as the only true form of immortality available to Homeric heroes: they live on in what people say about them after they are dead.

IV. Agamemnon dishonors Achilles because of an affront to his own *timê*.

A. Agamemnon has himself suffered a loss of *timê* since he had to return his *geras*, the concubine Chryseis, to her father Chryses. Agamemnon thus tries to restore his own lost *timê* by taking Achilles’ *geras*, Briseis.

B. Agamemnon’s action is not justified, since his “dishonor” differs from Achilles’ in key ways:

1. Agamemnon’s dishonor is required by the god Apollo, while Achilles’ is a direct, unnecessary, human-to-human affront.

2. As Achilles says, though there is nowhere to get a replacement for Chryseis now, if ever the Greeks sack Troy, they will pick a fine replacement *geras* for Agamemnon.

V. Achilles responds to Agamemnon’s actions by withdrawing from battle and by actively seeking the Greeks’ temporary defeat.

A. Achilles declares that he will no longer fight against the Trojans. In fact, he threatens to take the Myrmidons and return home.

B. Achilles also summons his mother Thetis, and asks her to petition Zeus to let the Trojans gain dominance over the Greeks until the Greeks once again give *timê* to Achilles.

1. Thetis’ appeal to Zeus gives the audience a glimpse of the gods on Olympus, and the power dynamics that operate among them.

2. Zeus agrees that the Trojans will have temporary ascendance, although he can’t alter the fated downfall of Troy.

3. Zeus’ intervention allows for the Greeks’ temporary defeat without detracting from their valor.

C. Within the context of Achilles’ own culture and assumptions, his reaction is not excessive.

1. By dishonoring him, Agamemnon has removed Achilles’ motivation for fighting.

2. The society reflected in the Homeric poems is in many ways a “shame” culture, in which a warrior’s sense of worth is largely determined by how others perceive him and what others say about him.

3. Thus, Agamemnon has done more than insult or dishonor Achilles; he has called Achilles’ whole worth into question.
VI. Books II–IV stress the results of Achilles’ withdrawal from battle and Zeus’ promise to Thetis, and introduce several of the most important characters in the story: Odysseus, Nestor, Paris, Menelaos.

Essential Reading:

_Iliad_, Books I–II.

Supplementary Reading:

James V. Morrison, _Homeric Misdirection_, Chapter 2.
Jonathan Shay, _Achilles in Vietnam_, Chapters 1–2. An interesting analysis of _ménis_ as a kind of “indignant rage” by no means uncommon among soldiers who feel that “what is right” has been betrayed by their commanders. (Warning: These chapters contain a good deal of profanity in quotations of veterans’ own words.)
Laura M. Slatkin, _The Power of Thetis_.
Oliver Taplin, _Homeric Soundings_, Chapter 2, sections 2.1–22 (pp. 46–66).

Questions to Consider:

1. Some modern readers see Achilles’ reaction as that of a “spoiled brat,” who doesn’t want to play anymore when things aren’t going his way. In the context of a “shame culture,” does this interpretation make any sense?
2. Why do you think the bard chose to focus on the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, rather than on a more obvious highlight of the Trojan War legend (i.e., the Sack of Troy)?
Lecture Four
Within the Walls of Troy

Scope: This lecture examines Homer’s portrayal of the Trojans, which is sympathetic, three-dimensional, and nuanced. The Trojans are not portrayed as villains; rather, the war is a terrible tragedy for them, and one that they never sought. They fight not just for *timê* and *kleos* but for their lives and their country’s survival. Our view of them is colored throughout by the knowledge that they will be defeated. We examine two crucial scenes, one between Priam and Helen and the other between Hektor and Andromache, and discuss both how the portrayal of these characters adds to our overall picture of the war, and how our knowledge of events outside the *Iliad* heightens the pathos of these scenes.

Outline

I. Our first sustained view of the Trojans comes in Book III, where we meet the noncombatants Priam and Helen.
   A. The bard shows us Priam and other Trojan elders watching the battle from the city wall.
      1. We are introduced not only to Priam but to Helen. Her ambiguous nature is summed up by the words of the Trojan elders as they look at her.
      2. Priam’s first words, when he calls Helen “dear child,” set his “character note.”
      3. “The gods are blameworthy”; these words of Priam’s foreground the limitations of human control.
      4. Certain aspects of this scene raise again the “Homeric Question,” post-Perry Melman.
      5. The scene in which Helen names the heroes is an excellent example of the “displacement” of episodes that logically should have happened earlier in the war into the narrative of the *Iliad*.
   B. The pathos of the Trojans’ position is highlighted by a vignette of Paris and Helen together.
      1. Paris is inside Troy because Aphrodite rescued him from the field of battle, where he was fighting a duel with Menelaos, and put him down in his own bedroom.
      2. Aphrodite summons Helen to join Paris. Helen resists, but Aphrodite threatens her and she obeys.
      3. The fact that Helen now despises Paris as much as anyone else does adds an element of futility to the whole war.

II. The Trojans fight not just for *timê* and *kleos* but also for their country’s survival. We see this most clearly in Hektor, who appears in the early books.
of the *Iliad* both as the leader of the Trojans in the field, and with his family inside the walls of Troy.

A. Hektor appears as the Trojan leader and spokesman in Book III.
   1. In his first words in the *Iliad*, Hektor scolds Paris for the shame and hardship he has brought on the Trojans.
   2. Although the duel with Menelaos is Paris’ idea, it is Hektor who suggests it to the Greeks.

B. We see Hektor inside Troy with his family in Book VI.
   1. Hektor goes into Troy to ask his mother to offer gifts to Athena, and to summon Paris back to battle.
   2. Hektor meets his wife Andromache and baby son Astyanax on the walls of Troy. Their conversation gives us a glimpse of what the Trojans warriors are fighting for.
   3. Hektor’s own statement of why he must fight reiterates the importance of “shame,” but also highlights his role as protector of his city.

III. Our view of the Trojans is colored throughout by the knowledge that they will be defeated.

A. Hektor’s meeting with Andromache and Astyanax lets us see the cost of the Trojan War in human terms.

B. Hektor will be killed by Achilles.

C. Astyanax will be thrown from the walls of Troy.

D. Andromache will be led away into slavery.

IV. Our view of the Trojans is also colored by the obvious disparity between what they are risking (the total destruction of their culture) and what they are risking it for (Paris’ and Helen’s adulterous affair).

A. This disparity was noticed in antiquity; from the 6th century BC on, authors wondered why Priam did not just send Helen back.

B. The *Iliad* itself takes account of this disparity in the encounter of the Trojan Glaukos and the Greek Diomedes.
   1. The two discover that they are hereditary “guest-friends,” and decide not to fight.
   2. As a token of their friendship, they exchange armor.
   3. The poet comments that Zeus took away Glaukos’ wits, so that he exchanged golden armor worth 100 oxen for bronze worth only 9.
   4. This can be read as a comment on Troy’s exchange of all the blessings of peace for Helen.
Essential Reading:

_Iliad_, Books III–VI.

Supplementary Reading:

Norman Austin, _Helen of Troy_, Chapter 1.
James V. Morrison, _Homeric Misdirection_, Chapter 5.
Oliver Taplin, _Homeric Soundings_, Chapter 4.

Questions to Consider:

1. Consider the “dual motivation” of Helen going to bed with Paris, despite saying that she no longer likes him. On one level, Helen can simply say “Aphrodite made me do it”; can her action be understood in modern psychological terms as well?

2. The _Iliad_ is a Greek epic, for a Greek audience, and the Trojans’ downfall is inevitable. Explain how the impact of the story would differ if Priam, Hektor, and Andromache were portrayed as unsympathetic characters.
Lecture Five
The Embassy to Achilles

Scope: As the battle continues, and continues to go badly for the Greeks, Achilles’ absence becomes more and more serious for them. Finally, on Nestor’s advice, Agamemnon decides to try to persuade Achilles to return to battle. Agamemnon admits that he was wrong, and sends Odysseus, Phoinix and Aias to speak to Achilles on his behalf and to describe the gifts he will offer Achilles in recompense. Achilles refuses to accept Agamemnon’s offered gifts, and does so in terms that call into question the whole time-based and kleos-based structure of his society. This lecture examines the arguments that the three emissaries make to Achilles, his reasons for rejecting those arguments, and the implications of his rejection for our understanding of his character.

Outline

I. As the battle continues (Books VII and VIII), the Greek leaders realize that they must do something to change their situation.
   A. Agamemnon suggests packing up and going home.
   B. Diomedes answers that Agamemnon can leave if he likes, but that the other Greeks will stay.
   C. Nestor applauds Diomedes’ words, and counsels Agamemnon to try to persuade Achilles to return to battle.

II. Agamemnon agrees that he was at fault, proposes a magnificent recompense for Achilles, and selects three men to serve as an embassy to Achilles.
   A. The recompense that Agamemnon offers Achilles includes the return of Briseis and many other slave women, the kingship of seven cities and marriage to one of Agamemnon’s daughters. These gifts mirror the three types of bribes offered by the goddesses to Paris in the beauty contest that ostensibly started the Trojan War.
   B. Agamemnon chooses Odysseus, Phoinix, and Aias as emissaries to approach Achilles. These three men are carefully chosen:
      1. Odysseus is the cleverest Greek, and the best persuasive orator. Thus, he can put Agamemnon’s case as well as it possibly can be put.
      2. Phoinix, an old man, was Achilles’ foster-father. He can appeal to emotion, and particularly to Achilles’ sense of filial duty toward his father Peleus, whose representative Phoinix is.
      3. Aias is the best Greek warrior after Achilles’ himself. He can appeal to Achilles’ sense of comradeship with other warriors.
III. The embassy goes to Achilles’ camp.
   A. When the three emissaries arrive at Achilles’ camp, they find him sitting by his tent.
      1. Achilles is playing the lyre and singing *klea andron* (the “glories of man”). Thus, he is portrayed as memorializing in song the deeds he will no longer perform in reality.
      2. *Kleos* is still crucial in the depiction of Achilles, although it is inverted here.
   B. Achilles greets his friends cordially and offers them a meal. His quarrel is with Agamemnon, not with them.

IV. After they eat, the three emissaries attempt, in turn, to persuade Achilles to accept Agamemnon’s gifts and return to battle. He answers each of them in turn.
   A. Odysseus speaks first and repeats Agamemnon’s offer, in the exact words that Agamemnon uses earlier in Book IX. This is an excellent example of how the formulaic style can allow for subtle characterizations.
      1. Achilles replies to Odysseus in an astonishing speech that seems to undercut the entire basis of his society and the warrior culture.
      2. Odysseus appeals to *timê* by listing Agamemnon’s gifts. But Achilles responds, in effect, that if *timê* can be taken away irrationally, at a leader’s whim, then it has no value.
      3. Achilles further remarks that his mother Thetis has informed him he has two possible, alternative fates: to win *kleos* by dying at Troy, or to return home and live a long, but peaceful and inglorious, life. He says that he intends to sail home, and counsels others to do so as well.
   B. Phoinix speaks second, and uses two arguments.
      1. First, he appeals to Achilles’ sense of affection and obligation.
      2. Second, Phoinix tells a story of a famous hero from an earlier generation, Meleagros, who quarreled with his mother, refused gifts that were offered him to end the quarrel, and only set aside his wrath too late, after he could no longer gain any advantage from yielding.
      3. Phoinix’ appeal to the authority of antiquity functions within the epic precisely as the epic functions within its own society: as a paradigm for appropriate behavior.
      4. Achilles rejects Phoinix’ plea no less firmly than that of Odysseus.
   C. Finally, Aias speaks.
      1. He gives a very short speech accusing Achilles of being pitiless toward his fellow soldiers.
      2. Achilles relents to the extent of saying that he will not sail for home. However, he will not fight until the Trojans’ fires reach the Greeks’ ships.
V. The emissaries have to be content with this answer, which they report back to Agamemnon. As Book IX closes, the Greeks’ situation remains desperate.

VI. Book IX appears at a crucial point in the Iliad.

A. If, as some scholars believe, the epic was originally performed over three days, then this book either closes the first day or opens the second day of performance.

B. It is very appropriate to have this sort of restating of the conflict and reiterating of some of the crucial themes at precisely this point of the narrative.

Essential Reading:

Iliad, Books VII–IX.

Supplementary Reading:

James V. Morrison, Homeric Misdirection, Appendix.
Seth L. Schein, Mortal Hero, Chapter 4.
Oliver Taplin, Homeric Soundings, Chapter 2, Section 2.3 (pp. 66–73).

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain the implications of Achilles’ stated intention to choose a long, inglorious life over death in battle. Why can this be described as a rejection of his culture’s entire system of mores?

2. Why does Aias’ appeal to Achilles succeed, at least partially, where Odysseus and Phoinix fail?
Lecture Six
The Paradox of Glory

Scope: In this lecture, we look in detail at the concept of kleos and its crucial thematic importance for the Iliad. Kleos is the only kind of immortality available to a Homeric warrior, and is of the utmost importance; every major warrior strives for it, often in a type scene of battle-prowess called an aristeia. But kleos can be gained only by dying or by killing. Thus, a kind of paradox lies at the heart of the Iliad’s depiction of the warrior’s quest for kleos. Through an examination of the essential duality of Achilles’ character, we see how he is the best representative of this paradox of kleos. Finally, we consider how the gods’ immortality makes them unable to gain kleos in this sense.

Outline

I. One of the central themes of the Iliad is “the human condition,” and what mortality means.
   A. The Iliad is often called a “poem of death,” and not just because so many people die in it.
   B. As we will see later, the resolution of the whole epic turns on Achilles’ final acceptance of the human condition, including death.

II. Central to the Iliad’s conception of the human condition is the paradox of kleos (which is related linguistically to the English verb “to call”).
   A. In his description of his two possible fates, Achilles links kleos with the adjective aphthiton, meaning “imperishable.”
      1. Kleos aphthiton, imperishable glory, is what the Homeric warrior ultimately fights for and what is bestowed by epic poetry itself.
      2. There is a nearly exact parallel phrase in Sanskrit, one of three ancient Indo-European languages with a substantial extant body of literature.
   B. Imperishable glory is the only kind of meaningful immortality available to a Homeric warrior, but it can only be gained through losing life or causing someone else to lose it.
      1. At death the psyche leaves the body and goes to the Underworld.
      2. The existence of the psyche in the Underworld is vague and unsubstantial. This is not a view of the afterlife calculated to provide consolation for bodily death.
      3. Thus, only kleos provides any kind of significant immortality.
   C. The Iliad foregrounds several warriors in turn, in their pursuit of kleos aphthiton, by giving each one his own aristeia, or extended type scene of special valor, with several recognizable parts. Not all of these elements are always present, but this is the basic form of an aristeia:
1. First, the warrior arms himself in gleaming armor.
2. He bursts into the ranks of the enemy, wreaks great slaughter among them, and turns the tide of battle.
3. He is wounded himself, which causes a setback for his side until he prays to a god and is healed and strengthened.
4. He returns to battle and kills an important enemy.
5. A fierce battle ensues over this enemy’s body, which is finally taken from the warrior, often through divine intervention.

D. Achilles’ *aristeia* is the culmination of the poem; others, of varying length, belong to Diomedes, Agamemnon, Hektor, and Patroklos.

III. The paradoxical nature of *kleos* (immortal fame gained only through acts of death) is confronted over and over again in the epic. One of its clearest articulations comes in Sarpedon’s words to Glaukos in Book XII. (Note: see Biographical Notes for information on these and other characters in the *Iliad*.)

IV. Achilles himself is the best representative of the contradictions inherent in *kleos*.

A. His relationship with his mother marks him out as different from other heroes, since Thetis is the only divine parent in the *Iliad* who has long, intimate conversations with her human child.

B. This special relationship with Thetis gives Achilles a kind of view from the outside on mortality, almost a “gods’-eye view,” especially regarding his two possible fates.
   1. Superficially, Achilles’ choice of fates is the same faced by all warriors.
   2. But where other warriors suspect they might die at Troy if they stay, Achilles knows that he will die there.

C. Achilles’ rejection of the mores of his society in Book IX is thus more far reaching than might appear at first. In effect, by rejecting *kleos* he is questioning his world’s whole paradigm of what it means to be human.

V. *Kleos* as it appears in the *Iliad* is a human phenomenon; since gods cannot die, they cannot achieve *kleos* in the same sense that a human can.

A. Human mortality is the crucial distinction between human beings and these very anthropomorphic gods.
   1. The gods are the *athanatoi*, or deathless ones. They cannot die.
   2. Humans are the *thnêtoi*, or dying ones. They must die.
   3. Throughout the *Iliad*, Homer stresses the actuality of warrior’s deaths. Wounds in the *Iliad* are either fairly minor or result in almost immediate death. This adds to the focus on death as the inevitable outcome of battle.
B. Homer uses the distinction between mortals and immortals to highlight the human condition through contrasting it with the gods’ state of “easy living.”

Essential Reading:
Iliad, Books X–XII.

Supplementary Reading:
Mark W. Edwards, Poet of the Iliad, Chapters 8 and 19.
Jasper Griffin, Homer on Life and Death, Chapters III–IV.
Seth L. Schein, Mortal Hero, Chapter 3, Section 4.
Jonathan Shay, Achilles in Vietnam, Chapter 7. This chapter (“What Homer Left Out”) includes graphic descriptions of wounds and lingering deaths, and of civilian suffering, that some students may prefer to skip.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is the choice of fates offered to Achilles a genuine choice? Could he really decide simply to quit fighting and return home to his father Peleus?
2. Do you agree that mortality, i.e., impermanence, is the essential defining hallmark of human life, or do you think that our culture’s view of this is essentially different from the view portrayed in the Iliad?
Lecture Seven
The Role of the Gods

Scope: In this lecture we examine the gods. We begin by considering what effect the gods’ appearance as active participants has on the narrative. The lecture then moves on to examine the gods’ essential nature and what kind of beings they are, and sketches how, in Homer’s treatment of the gods, the essential contrast of immortality and mortality operates to enhance the *Iliad*’s portrait of the human condition and its implications. Finally, the lecture considers the topic of fate (*moira*) and its workings with respect to the gods.

Outline

I. The gods are essential characters in both Homeric epics, but particularly in the *Iliad*. Their actions both contribute to the action of the narrative and reiterate key themes.

A. The gods take direct, concrete part in the action. Some critics have tried to explain their involvement away as merely a metaphorical way of describing human emotions, but there are many times when such explanations simply will not work (e.g., the Book III scene where Aphrodite physically removes Paris from the battlefield).

B. The involvement of the gods in the narrative enhances the audience’s sense of inevitability.

1. Often the action of a scene could make sense on the purely human level (cf. the Book XI scene of Aias dropping back from the fighting).

2. By showing us the divine level as well, Homer makes clear that the events must happen in just this way. This is often referred to as “over-determination.”

C. In their interactions with one another, the gods reiterate some of the most important underlying narrative themes of the *Iliad*.

1. The power struggle between Zeus and Poseidon in Book XV recalls the power struggle between Achilles and Agamemnon.

2. The seduction of Zeus by Hera (Book XIV), in which a male is distracted by sex from the business at hand, recalls Paris and Helen in Book III, the sexual distraction at the root of the Agamemnon/Achilles struggle, and even the underlying cause of the Trojan War itself (i.e., the over-valuation of sex by Paris).

D. Most importantly, the gods reiterate, by counter-example, the all-important examination of the human condition. To understand this point, we need to look at what kind of beings these gods are.
II. The term “god” is regularly used to translate the Greek *theos*, but for modern readers this translation brings all sorts of misconceptions with it.

A. Let us start with a list of what the Homeric gods are not.
   1. They are not consistently good, or merciful, or even (apparently) just.
   2. Though they know a great deal, they are not omniscient.
   3. Though very powerful, they are not omnipotent.
   4. They are not transcendent. In other words, they did not create the universe, but are part of it.
   5. They may not even have created human beings.
   6. With rare exceptions, the relationship between these gods and humans is not based on mutual love.

B. Next, let us look at what these gods are.
   1. On the most basic level, they originally represented personified forces of nature. They are much more than that, but their roles as natural forces are still obvious. Aphrodite is sexual passion; Ares is war.
   2. Again, this is not merely metaphor; these gods really do control the forces of nature with which they are associated.
   3. The gods are conceived of as anthropomorphic. They share human form, human passions, and human emotions.

III. From the point of view of the *human* characters in the *Iliad*, the gods are awe-inspiring, dangerous, powerful beings whom it is wise not to offend.

IV. When viewed on their own terms, however, the gods of the *Iliad* seem shallow, petty, trivial; they almost seem, at times, like comic relief.

A. They complain loudly about minor injuries.
B. They are easily distracted from the troubles even of their human favorites.
C. They brawl with one another, calling each other names and boxing each others’ ears.
D. The scene of Zeus’ seduction by Hera gives a very undignified portrait of the “father of gods and men.”

V. Why does the *Iliad* present this double view of the gods? What does the epic gain from the apparent pettiness of its divinities?

A. It was by no means necessary for epic to portray the gods this way; the gods are not so petty or shallow in the *Odyssey*.
B. The key point for understanding the gods in the *Iliad* is that their lack of human vulnerability also means a lack of any capacity for nobility. A being that cannot die or even be seriously wounded cannot seriously be at risk, and thus cannot exhibit courage or self-sacrifice.
C. This contrast, between humans faced with the utterly serious issues of life and death and gods who can risk nothing, once again serves to focus attention on the essence of what it means to be human.

VI. Finally, we cannot leave a discussion of the role of the gods in the *Iliad* without looking at the concept of *moira*—fate, as it is usually translated.

A. *Moira*’s most basic meaning is “share” or “portion.”

B. When applied to humans, it comes to mean “share of life,” thus “time of death.”
   1. Each person’s *moira* is inevitable, but generally not known ahead of time.
   2. Thus, *moira* has been defined as “what, in retrospect, was bound to happen.”

C. The gods seem generally to know each human’s *moira*.
   1. Thus, Thetis can tell Achilles about his choice of two *moirai*.
   2. Zeus knows that Achilles will kill Hektor.

D. The question of whether or not the gods can change a human’s *moira* is left ambiguous by the *Iliad*.
   1. Usually, the answer seems to be no. For example, Thetis clearly cannot change Achilles’ fate.
   2. When Zeus considers intervening to save the life of his son Sarpedon, the implication seems to be that he could change Sarpedon’s *moira* if he so chose, but that he decides not to.

E. The whole picture of *moira* reiterates that the gods are not transcendent deities outside the universe, but part of the universe. While not bound by *moira* in the same way humans are, they are nevertheless part of the system in which it operates and must respect it.

**Essential Reading:**

*Iliad*, Books XIII–XV.

**Supplementary Reading:**


Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, Chapters V–VI. Very good on the gods’ sublimity, although (in my opinion) he underplays the significance of the more frivolous elements in their characterization.

Seth L. Schein, *Mortal Hero*, Chapter 2. See especially this chapter’s Appendix “On Fate.”

Oliver Taplin, *Homeric Soundings*, Chapter V.
Questions to Consider:

1. What are the implications for a culture of believing in gods who are neither transcendent nor omnipotent?

2. Many people have tried to extrapolate a consistent, complete view of the workings of *moira* from the *Iliad*. Is it reasonable to expect such a concept to work consistently?
Lecture Eight
The Longest Day

Scope: This lecture continues our comparison of gods and mortals by examining the dual narratives, divine and human, of *Iliad*, Books XI–XV, the books which lead up to and feature Hektor’s *aristeia*. We see that in this section of the epic it is possible to extract a coherent narrative which excludes the gods’ interventions, and shows the progress of the battle as it would have seemed to the participants. But in the privileged view of the action given to us as Homer’s audience, we also see an unusually complex and detailed narrative of the gods’ actions intertwined with the human narrative. Once again, this dual level of action stresses the nature and meaning of human mortality.

Outline

I. In Book XI, Zeus sends Iris to tell Hektor to hold back until he sees Agamemnon wounded. Once this has happened, Zeus promises victory to Hektor until the sun sets.
   A. This one day lasts from Book XI through Book XVIII, line 240.
   B. Hektor’s *aristeia* lasts from Book XII through Book XV.

II. The description of battle in these books can be analyzed on two levels, the human and the divine. The characters within the epic normally see only the human level; as the audience, we see the divine level of action as well.

III. On the human level, the action follows the standard give and take of battle, with courage and desperate fighting on both sides.
   A. Book XI stresses the Greeks’ vulnerability without Achilles.
      1. The fighting begins with Agamemnon’s brief *aristeia*.
      2. Once Agamemnon is wounded and withdraws from battle, Hektor rallies his men and rushes into battle, where he kills many.
      3. Diomedes and Odysseus are both wounded. This means that the only outstanding Greek warrior still in the battle is Aias the Greater, who fights valiantly to hold the Trojans from the ships.
   B. Book XII stresses the Trojans’ prowess during Hektor’s promised day.
      1. At Hektor’s urging, the Trojans attack the Greeks’ trench and wall, which they had built as a defense for their camp. Sarpedon makes the first breach in the wall.
      2. Hektor smashes the gate of the wall. This leaves nothing between the Trojans and the Greeks ships but a mass of demoralized Greeks, lacking their foremost warriors (Agamemnon, Diomedes, Odysseus, Achilles).
3. The narrator stresses the greater physical prowess of the heroes of Troy as compared to “modern” men (i.e., Homer’s contemporaries).

C. In Book XIII, the Greeks rally, and the tide of battle turns temporarily against the Trojans.
   1. The Trojans retreat to take counsel.
   2. Hektor continues to fight, with Paris beside him.
   3. Hektor and Aias the Greater meet face to face.

D. The Greeks continue to gain strength throughout Book XIV.
   1. In a conversation with Nestor, Diomedes, and Odysseus, Agamemnon expresses despair and again suggests that the Greeks should sail away by night. Diomedes suggests instead that they should return to the field of battle, wounded though they are, to encourage the other Greeks.
   2. Aias the Greater wounds Hektor by hitting him with a boulder. Hektor is dazed, and this encourages the Greeks further.

E. In Book XV, Hektor regains his strength and returns to battle. With Hektor leading, the Trojans break through the Greeks’ wall and reach the ships.
   1. Hektor calls for fire to burn the ships.
   2. Aias the Greater leaps from deck to deck, urging his fellow Greeks to rally and protect the ships.

IV. The narrative in these books* thus makes perfect sense, and is excitement-packed and suspenseful, without even considering the gods. But the action works on the divine level as well.

A. Zeus has promised victory to Hektor, and so works against the Greeks in this section.
   1. In Book XI, Zeus puts fear into Aias’ mind, so that he temporarily falls back.
   2. In Book XII, Zeus strengthens Sarpedon, who makes the first breach in the Greeks’ wall.

B. Poseidon takes the form of Kalchas and rallies the Greeks in Books XIII–XIV.

C. Hera observes Poseidon rallying the Greeks, and decides to aid the Greeks by diverting Zeus’ attention from the battle. Accordingly, she seduces him so that he will sleep.

D. It is while Zeus is sleeping that Hektor is wounded by Aias.

E. Zeus awakes in Book XV, and reestablishes the Trojans’ dominance.
   1. He sees Hektor dazed and vomiting blood, and sends Apollo to heal him. Apollo leads Hektor and the Trojans into battle; he kicks down part of the Greeks’ wall and the Trojans pour through.
   2. Zeus sends Iris to tell Poseidon to stop helping the Greeks.
   3. He scolds Hera for seducing him and diverting his attention.
4. Zeus describes what will happen next in the battle: Hektor will kill Patroklos, Achilles will return to battle, and Hektor will die at Achilles’ hands.

V. The narrative in these four books thus includes exceptionally intricate double-level action, which leads to the crucial turning point of the *Iliad*: Patroklos’ entry into battle in Achilles’ armor.

**Supplementary Reading:**


**Questions to Consider:**

1. Explain how the impact of this section of the *Iliad* would suffer if the gods’ interventions were removed from the narrative.
2. Hera’s seduction of Zeus strikes some readers as out of place in this section of the *Iliad*; its tone seems inappropriate to the surrounding battle narratives. Do you agree or disagree? What do you make of the tone of that scene?

*Note: The numbering of the books was done by scholars in the Great Library of Alexandria in the 3rd or 2nd century BC. The numbering scheme is based on the number of papyrus scrolls needed to copy out the narrative. The divisions, although artificial, are now accepted as convention.*
Lecture Nine
The Death of Patroklos

Scope: In this lecture we focus on Books XVI–XVII, the crucial turning point of the *Iliad*. The events of this book lead to Achilles’ return to battle, his killing of Hektor, and the eventual resolution in the *Iliad’s* final book. The lecture begins by discussing Patroklos’ character and his role as Achilles’ substitute in battle. We then examine Patroklos’ *aristeia* and death, noting how the death of Zeus’ son Sarpedon at Patroklos’ hands prefigures Hektor’s later death and, outside the narrative framework of the *Iliad*, the death of Achilles himself. We also consider how the scene in which Hektor kills Patroklos highlights both these characters’ human ignorance, as opposed to Achilles’ foreknowledge of his fate. The lecture concludes with an interpretation of the scene in which Zeus pities the immortal horses of Achilles as they weep for the dead Patroklos.

Outline

I. Books XVI and XVII, which feature Patroklos’ *aristeia*, his death, and the fight over his body, are the crucial turning point of the *Iliad*, since the loss of Patroklos will cause Achilles’ return to battle.

II. Patroklos is Achilles’ dearest friend and, in some sense, his alter-ego. The bard gives us several glimpses of him before Book XVI, in which he becomes crucial to the unfolding of the narrative.
   A. In Book I, Patroklos delivers Briseis to Agamemnon’s heralds.
   B. In Book IX, Patroklos is present with Achilles when the embassy comes to try to persuade him back to battle.
   C. In Book XI, Achilles sends Patroklos to find out from Nestor who has been wounded in the fighting. During their conversation, Nestor suggests that Patroklos should go into battle wearing Achilles’ armor.
   D. At the end of Book XI, as Patroklos is on his way back to Achilles, he stops to tend to a wounded Greek warrior, a fitting example for his epithet “gentle” or “kind Patroklos.”

III. Patroklos is thus established as an important companion to Achilles and one worthy to serve as Achilles’ surrogate. In Book XVI, he takes on this role by going into battle wearing Achilles’ armor.
   A. At the beginning of the book, Patroklos tells Achilles that Diomedes, Odysseus, and Agamemnon are all wounded, and asks to wear Achilles’ armor into battle himself.
   B. Achilles reiterates his intention to keep out of the fighting until it reaches his own ships. He agrees to let Patroklos borrow his armor and
chariot, but warns him just to drive the Trojans back from the Greek camp and not to try to go all the way to the walls of Troy.

C. As they are speaking, the Trojans fire the first of the Greek ships. Achilles urges Patroklos to hasten into the fight; he also urges the Myrmidons to fight bravely.

D. Achilles prays to Zeus to let Patroklos fight gloriously and return safely. The bard comments that “the father granted him one prayer, but denied the other.”

IV. Patroklos’ *aristeia* includes the killing of many Trojans, most importantly Zeus’ son Sarpedon. Sarpedon’s death prefigures the deaths of Patroklos, Hektor, and even Achilles by setting up three themes that will recur in those later deaths.

A. The dead man’s armor is stripped from his body.

B. There is a fierce fight for possession of the corpse.

C. The gods intervene to protect the body from destruction or corruption.

V. Ignoring Achilles’ advice, Patroklos rushes on to the wall of Troy, and tries to mount it. Finally, he is slain by Hektor, with the aid of Apollo.

A. With his dying words, Patroklos prophesies that Achilles will avenge him.

B. Hektor does not accept the prophecy, even though in ancient Greek culture, dying prophecies were usually respected as being true.

C. Hektor and Patroklos are both essentially human, able to misinterpret, forget, or overlook predictions about their future fates.

VI. In Book XVII, the Greeks and Trojans fight fiercely over Patroklos’ body. Hektor strips the armor from the body and puts it on.

A. Zeus observes that Hektor overlooks the possibility of his own death, but says that he will invest Hektor with great strength, to compensate him for the fact that he will be killed by Achilles.

B. Achilles’ immortal horses weep for Patroklos, and Zeus pities them.

1. These horses stress once again the preeminence of death for what it means to be human, since they themselves are immortal.

2. Zeus’ words to them are one of the *Iliad’s* starkest statements about the human condition.

C. A messenger is sent to tell Achilles of Patroklos’ death. This sets the stage for Achilles’ return to battle.

**Essential Reading:**

*Iliad*, Books XVI–XVII.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**

1. At lines 686–691, the poet comments that if Patroklos had only listened to Achilles and not tried to scale the wall of Troy, he would have escaped death. How does this fit in with the idea that all these events are fated, that Patroklos must die so that Achilles will be moved to fight Hektor?

2. Book XVII shows Zeus pitying Sarpedon, Hektor, and Achilles’ horses. What purpose do you think is served by this? Why do we see Zeus feeling more pity here than elsewhere in the *Iliad*?
Lecture Ten
Achilles Returns to Battle

Scope: This lecture discusses Achilles’ reaction to Patroklos’ death, and his re-entry into battle. The lecture begins by noting how Patroklos’ death changes Achilles; no longer withdrawn from battle, he is fixated on vengeance. The lecture describes Achilles’ informal return to battle in the scene that ends Hektor’s day of glory and his later formal return after he receives the armor made for him by Hephaistos; we then turn to examining the dual treatment of Achilles in this section of the *Iliad*. He is described in vocabulary and imagery appropriate to a dead person, and thus is in some way treated as though he were already dead; but at the same time, Achilles is surrounded with fire imagery and with descriptions of battle prowess that are more appropriate to a god than to a human. The lecture concludes by suggesting that this dual portrait of Achilles stresses his refusal to accept Patroklos’ death and, in a larger sense, to accept mortality itself.

Outline

I. Patroklos’ death is the crucial turning point of the *Iliad*; the events of Books XVI–XVII change the focus of the narrative, and change Achilles.
   A. From now on, Achilles is no longer withdrawn because of rage over his lost *timê*. His anger at Agamemnon is no longer the motivating force of the narrative.
   B. Rather, he is raging in battle over his lost friend. His desire for revenge, his pursuit of Hektor, and its aftermath motivate the rest of the *Iliad*.

II. Achilles’ reaction to Patroklos’ death is twofold: he is overwhelmed with grief, and utterly determined on vengeance against Hektor.
   A. Thetis comes to mourn with him, and reminds him that he will die soon after Hektor. Achilles accepts this, thus finally choosing which fate to follow.
   B. Thetis leaves to visit Hephaistos, who will make new armor for Achilles. Book XVIII ends with a description of the armor, particularly of the great Shield, on which Hephaistos pictures the entire cosmos, and two cities, one at war and one at peace.

III. Achilles returns to battle, first informally and then after formal reconciliation with Agamemnon.
   A. Iris comes with a message from Hera, telling Achilles to show himself to the Trojans, so that his comrades can rescue Patroklos’ body.
1. Achilles has no armor, but Athena wraps a cloud around his head and crowns him with flame.
2. He stands by the Greeks’ ditch and shouts, and Athena shouts with him.
3. The Trojans panic.
4. The Iliad’s longest day ends here, as the sun sets behind Achilles.

B. This scene has had a particular resonance in later literature. One example is Patrick Shaw-Stewart’s untitled poem, written during his leave from Gallipoli in 1915.

C. After Thetis returns with the armor made by Hephaistos, Achilles and Agamemnon formally reconcile their differences. Achilles then returns to battle carrying the shield made by Hephaistos.

IV. From Book XVIII through Book XXII, Achilles is portrayed as essentially inhuman, in two respects.

A. Achilles is portrayed as though he were already dead.
   1. Patroklos’ death symbolically almost seems to equal Achilles’ death.
   2. The imagery and vocabulary used to describe Achilles as he mourns is typically used to describe dead heroes.
   3. Thetis’ actions and words are indicative of a woman mourning a dead male, in this case the still-living Achilles.

B. Achilles is portrayed as though he had the powers of a force of nature, or a god.
   1. He is described over and over again with fire imagery, to an extent that seems almost to equate him to fire, a force of nature.
   2. From the time he returns to battle through Hektor’s death, no other mortal kills anyone; Achilles seems to take over the operations of death itself.
   3. He kills entirely without pity, even when he ought to show mercy (e.g., when he kills Lykaon, the young son of Priam).
   4. The only entity that can stop his excessive killing is a god, the river Skamander (or Xanthos).
   5. He goes into battle carrying a representation of the entire world on his shield.

C. Thus throughout this section of the Iliad, the two halves of Achilles’ nature—his divine side, inherited from his mother, and his mortal side, inherited from his father—are highlighted and the opposition between them is stressed.

V. This sub- and super-human Achilles rejects the human condition.

A. Death itself is put on hold, as Achilles cannot reconcile himself to Patroklos’ death. He will not hold a funeral for Patroklos.

B. Life is put on hold as well; Achilles will not eat, sleep, wash, or have sex.
C. In Book XIX, one of Achilles’ horses, Xanthos, speaks and prophesies Achilles’ death.
   1. This horse, an animal who will not die, is in some ways anomalous just as Achilles is, a human who knows too much about death.
   2. Their conversation thus stresses Achilles’ division from normal humanity.

D. Achilles’ reintegration into humanity will depend on his encounter with Hektor.

**Essential Reading:**

_The Iliad_, Books XVIII–XXI.

**Supplementary Reading:**


Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, Chapters 3–5. (Warning: These chapters, especially Chapter 5, contain unexpurgated transcripts of veterans’ conversations with Dr. Shay. The language contains a great deal of profanity, and the descriptions of violence are very graphic. Some students may therefore prefer to omit this selection.)


**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is the significance of the scenes that appear on Achilles’ shield? Are they connected to the wider themes of the _Iliad_?

2. After the stress throughout so much of the _Iliad_ on Achilles’ anger at Agamemnon and his refusal to accept Agamemnon’s gifts, do you find his sudden change of heart in Book XIX believable? Why or why not?
Lecture Eleven
Achilles and Hektor

Scope: In this lecture, we examine the characters of Achilles and Hektor. The lecture addresses both the bard's characterization of the two men and their interactions with one another. The *Iliad* presents Achilles and Hektor as polar opposites to one another in several key ways; the lecture identifies several of these contrasts, and discusses how they underscore Hektor's place in his community and Achilles' essential isolation. We then analyze the scene in which Achilles kills Hektor, and consider how this conflict of opposites is crucial for the final resolution of the *Iliad*.

Outline

I. Achilles and Hektor, the most important characters in the *Iliad*, are in many ways polar opposites of one another.
   A. Hektor is a fully realized human, connected with his family and his community. Many readers find him the most sympathetic and accessible character in the *Iliad*.
   B. Achilles is inhumanly isolated, cut off from family, friends, and community.

II. The poem stresses this opposition in their characters through several key contrasts: their family situations, their knowledge of and attitude toward the future, and their motivations for fighting.
   A. Their family situations are contrasted.
      1. Hektor's human parents are present, watching the battle. Achilles' human father is far away; his goddess mother appears when he calls her, but is not regularly there.
      2. Hektor’s mother is aged and pitiable; Achilles’ mother is eternally young and immortal.
      3. We see Hektor interact with his wife and child; Achilles is unmarried, and his son Neoptolemos is not present.
   B. There is an opposition in their knowledge of the future, and in their attitude toward death.
      1. Hektor is humanly fallible; he often misunderstands or disregards prophecies. Throughout the *Iliad*, he continues to hope for life.
      2. Achilles' special knowledge of his two possible fates marks him out as different from most humans. After Patroklos’ death, he knowingly chooses death for himself.
   C. There is an opposition in their motivations for fighting.
1. Hektor would prefer not to fight, but recognizes that he must, to defend his city and people. Thus, he subordinates his individual desires to the good of his society.

2. Achilles first refuses to fight, and then desires only revenge for Patroklos. Thus, he overvalues one individual.

III. Hektor accepts the implications of the human condition, however great the cost to himself may be. Achilles rejects the implications of the human condition by refusing to be reconciled to Patroklos’ death.

IV. Hektor’s humanity and Achilles’ inhumanity are highlighted in Book XXII, when they fight and Hektor is killed.

   A. Hektor considers retreating; is overwhelmed by fear; runs from Achilles; feels as though he were caught in a nightmare. Achilles is described as looking like the “lord of battles.”

   B. Achilles’ pursuit of Hektor takes them by the springs where Trojan women used to wash clothes, thus giving us a glimpse of Trojan society at peace.

   C. When Hektor stops running, he proposes to Achilles that each promise to return the other’s body to his people. Achilles refuses.

   D. After he is wounded, Hektor begs Achilles not to defile his body. Achilles responds brutally, still showing himself to be in the “sub-human” mode.

   E. As Achilles defiles Hektor’s body, Priam and Hekabe watch from the walls, and Andromache faints at the sight. This defilement is even more serious because it prevents Hektor’s psyche from entering the Underworld.

V. The conflict of these two contrasting characters is crucial for the resolution of the *Iliad*, since only through killing and defiling Hektor does Achilles find a way eventually to reintegrate himself into humanity. The importance of their encounter is highlighted by Zeus’ weighing their two fates in a scale.

Essential Reading:

*Iliad*, Book XXII.

Supplementary Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. Compare the characters of Thetis and Hekabe. How do their similarities and their differences enhance the contrast between their two sons?

2. Compare Achilles’ words to the dying Hektor with Hektor’s words to the dying Patroklos in Book XVI. What do these two speeches tell us about the speakers?
Lecture Twelve
Enemies’ Tears: Achilles and Priam

Scope: This lecture focuses on the meeting of Achilles and Priam, and the final resolution of the *Iliad*. Even after he kills Hektor, Achilles still is unreconciled to Patroklos’ death; at the request of Patroklos’ ghost, Achilles gives him a funeral, but remains unconsolable and isolated from humanity. Only the visit of Priam to ransom Hektor’s body can reintegrate Achilles into the human community. We look closely at the meeting between these two enemies, Achilles and Priam, and discuss the impact of their encounter for our understanding of the nature of mortality, the underlying theme of the *Iliad*.

Outline

I. After he has killed Hektor, Achilles still cannot reconcile himself to Patroklos’ death.
   A. Patroklos’ ghost appears to Achilles, and asks him to bury Patroklos’ body, so that the ghost may pass into the Underworld.
   B. Achilles complies with the ghost’s request and holds an elaborate funeral for Patroklos (Book XXIII). However, even after the funeral Achilles continues to fast, to refrain from bathing, and to drag Hektor’s corpse around Patroklos’ tomb.

II. Finally the gods decide to intervene.
   A. Apollo addresses the other gods and says that it is time to force Achilles to give Hektor’s body back to his family.
   B. Zeus agrees. He sends Thetis to speak to Achilles, and Iris to urge Priam to visit Achilles and ransom Hektor’s body.
      1. Thetis informs Achilles of Zeus’ will. Achilles accepts this information with indifference.
      2. Iris takes Zeus’ message to Priam. Despite Hekabe’s objections, Priam decides to go.

III. Priam visits Achilles and offers ransom for Hektor’s body.
   A. At Hekabe’s urging, Priam prays to Zeus for success and safe return, and Zeus sends him a favorable omen, the sacred eagle of Zeus.
   B. Zeus sends Hermes to guide Priam to Achilles’ tent. Hermes appears in disguise, but reveals his identity to Priam just before leaving him.
   C. Priam enters Achilles’ tent and asks for Hektor’s body back. He beseeches Achilles, in his father Peleus’ name, to pity him and return Hektor’s body, and kisses Achilles’ hands.
IV. Achilles reacts with wonder, compassion, and grief to Priam’s request, and agrees to return Hektor’s body.
   A. The two enemies weep together, Priam for Hektor and Achilles for Patroklos.
   B. Achilles comforts Priam by referring to the mixed good and evil that Zeus bestows on all humans, and telling him that he too must bear adversity.
   C. Priam reminds Achilles of his request for Hektor’s body, and Achilles tells him that he has already agreed to give Hektor back, at Zeus’ command.
      1. Despite the compassion Achilles feels for Priam, they are still enemies and Achilles’ anger is just under the surface. He warns Priam not to make him angry.
      2. Achilles orders his slave women to wash Hektor’s body. He does this specifically so that Priam will not become angry when he sees the body’s degradation and Achilles, in turn, become enraged and kill Priam.
   D. Achilles himself carries Hektor’s body to Priam’s wagon.

V. Through his encounter with Priam, Achilles accepts mortality, and reassumes his humanity.
   A. After taking Hektor’s body to the wagon, Achilles tells Priam that it is time to eat.
      1. Achilles cites the example of Niobe, who managed to eat even after all twelve of her children had been killed.
      2. This is precisely what Thetis and others have been telling Achilles, but he has not been able to accept it.
      3. Somehow seeing his enemy’s grief moves Achilles to recognize that he too must accept death.
      4. Part of Homer’s genius is that he does not explain how this happens; he simply shows us that it does.
   B. Achilles himself kills a sheep, roasts it, and serves a meal to Priam. After they eat, Achilles promises a truce of eleven days so the Trojans can give Hektor a proper funeral.
   C. Achilles has a bed prepared for Priam. He himself sleeps beside Briseis; this is the last time we see Achilles in the Iliad. Now that he has been reintegrated into humanity, he can die (although his death is not shown in the Iliad).

VI. Priam returns to Troy with Hektor’s body, and the Iliad ends with Hektor’s funeral.
   A. Hermes comes to Priam and urges him not to sleep in the Greeks’ camp, but to go back to Troy immediately.
B. Andromache, Hekabe, and Helen each lament over Hektor’s body in turn.

C. The last line of the *Iliad* is “so they buried Hektor, tamer of horses.”

**Essential Reading:**

*Iliad*, Books XXIII–XXIV.

**Supplementary Reading:**


Charles Segal, *Mutilation of the Corpse*.


**Questions to Consider:**

1. Is it psychologically credible that Priam’s grief should move Achilles to acceptance of mortality and reintegration into humanity? Why or why not?

2. Does the final book of the *Iliad* provide a resolution for the issues raised in the earlier part of the work? What is the role of *kleos* here? Is any implicit answer ever given to the objections Achilles raises in Book IX?
**Timeline**

c. 3000–c. 1000 BC .......................Successive cities occupy Hisarlik; one of them may have been “Homer’s Troy.”

c. 1600–c. 1100 .........................Mycenaean civilization flourishes in Greece.

c. 1270 ..................................Destruction of Troy VI; Dörpfeld thought this was Homer’s Troy.

c.1300–1200 ............................Hittite documents mention Ahhiyawa and Wilusa, which may be references to Achaia and Ilion, and imply a war between the two.

c. 1190 ..................................Destruction of Troy VIIa; Blegen identified this as Homer’s Troy.

1184 ..................................The most commonly accepted traditional date for the Fall of Troy.

c. 800?–780? .........................The alphabet introduced into Greece.

c. 750?–700 ..............................The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are perhaps transcribed into writing.

c. 530 ...................................Peisistratos, tyrant of Athens, perhaps orders a “recension” or standardization of the Homeric epics.

334 BC ..................................Alexander the Great visits the site of Troy, and offers sacrifices to Achilles.

c. 3rd–2nd c. BC .......................The Alexandrian scholars edit the epics, writing copious marginal notes or “scholia” on them. The epics are probably divided into their standard book-divisions at this time.

48 BC ..................................Julius Caesar visits the site of Troy.

29?–19 BC .........................Virgil writes the *Aeneid*, modeled on the Homeric epics but taking the viewpoint of the Trojans (whom the Romans considered their ancestors). Book II of the *Aeneid* gives the fullest extant account of the Sack of Troy. The *Aeneid* was left incomplete when Virgil died in 19 BC.

1054 AD ...............................Permanent break between Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches leads to rapid loss of knowledge concerning Greek language and literature in the West.
c. 1170 ............................................ *Le Roman de Troie* by Bevoit de Saint-Maure brings the Trojan War story into the troubadour tradition.

c. 1313–1321 .................................. Dante writes *The Divine Comedy*.

1396 .......................................... Manuel Chrysoloras offers classes in Greek in Florence. This begins the revival of interest in Greek literature in Europe.

1450 .......................................... The Vatican Library is founded: it had acquired nine copies of the *Iliad* and four of the *Odyssey* by 1475.

1453 .......................................... The Sack of Constantinople by the Ottomans. At this point, a great many Greek scholars flee to Italy, bringing manuscripts with them. This is when the study of Greek becomes important in Europe.

1495 .......................................... Aldus Manutius founds the Aldine Press in Venice and begins printing editions of Greek classics.

1498 .......................................... Erasmus begins teaching Greek at Oxford. He becomes professor of Greek at Cambridge in 1511.

1508 .......................................... Girolamo Aleandro begins courses in Greek in Paris.

1795 .......................................... F. A. Wolf publishes *Prolegomena to Homer*.

1822 .......................................... Charles McLaren suggests that Hisarlik is the site of Troy.

1865 .......................................... Frank Calvert does trial excavations at Hisarlik.

1870–1873 .................................. Heinrich Schliemann conducts his first excavations at Hisarlik. He finds the “Treasure of Priam” in 1873.

1874–1878 .................................. Schliemann conducts excavations at Orchomenos, Mycenae, and Ithaka.

1878 .......................................... Schliemann’s second excavation at Troy.

1882–1883 .................................. Schliemann’s third excavation at Troy.

1888–1890 .................................. Schliemann’s final excavation at Troy, which ended with his death.
1928 ................................................Milman Parry publishes his “oral composition” theory of Homeric verse.

1945 ................................................The “Treasure of Priam” disappears from Berlin’s Museum for Prehistory and Early History, and is presumed destroyed.

1988–present ...................................Joint German-American excavations carried out at Troy.

1993 ................................................Official confirmation that the “Treasure of Priam” is in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, as had been reported in 1991.

1996 ................................................The “Treasure of Priam” goes on exhibition in Moscow.
ambrosia: The food of the gods. In the Iliad the gods anoint the dead bodies of Patroklos and Hektor with ambrosia to protect them from corruption. See also nectar.

Analysts (or Separatists): In Homeric studies, scholars who argue that the Iliad and the Odyssey are compilations of many separate, shorter poems.

aristeia: A “type scene” in which a particular hero fights with exceptional valor. An aristeia may be only a few lines long (for instance, Agamemnon’s in Il. XII) or may extend for several books (for instance, Achilles’ in Il. XIX–XXII).

athanatoi: “Deathless ones.” A term used to refer to the gods, particularly as contrasted to mortals, or thnêtoi.

bard: The singer of epic poetry. In a preliterate culture, a bard recreates his song in each performance, using traditional formulas and type scenes as building blocks of his poetry.

dactylic hexameter: The meter of epic. It is constructed of six “feet,” each consisting of either a dactyl (one long syllable followed by two short syllables) or a spondee (two long syllables). The resulting line is flexible and varied in Greek, though it tends to sound pedestrian in English.

Epic Cycle: A series of epics, no longer extant, which told the story of those episodes of the Trojan War not contained in the Iliad and the Odyssey.

epithet: An adjective or group of adjectives closely associated with a character’s name. Examples include “Hektor of the shining helmet,” “swift-footed Achilles,” and so on.

formula: In Parry’s definition, “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.”

geras: A “prize of honor”; a particularly valuable or esteemed token of distinction conferred on a warrior by his peers. Chryseis is Agamemnon’s geras; Briseis is Achilles’.

guzlar: A South Slavic bard, such as those studied by Milman Parry and Albert Lord. The guzlar chants his songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument called a guzle.

Hittites: Indo-European people whose kingdom flourished in Anatolia from c. 1650–c.1200 BC. Some scholars believe that Hittite documents mention Greece (Achaia) and Troy (Ilión), and even imply a war between the two.

“The Homeric Question”: The great scholarly question of whether the Homeric epics were written by a single author (or perhaps by two authors) or
are compilations of various shorter, traditional poems. See also Analysts and Unitarians.

in medias res: “In the middle of the subject.” This phrase describes the typical opening of an epic.

Indo-European: The prehistoric parent language of Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, most modern languages of Europe, and many modern languages of India. Indo-European was never written down, but scholars have made hypothetical reconstructions of some of its words and forms by comparative study of the languages which descended from it. The people who spoke this language are referred to as “Indo-Europeans.”

Hisarlik or Hissarlik: The flat-topped hill in the Troad where Schliemann located the prehistoric ruins of Troy.

Ithaka: Odysseus’ home island.

kleos, pl. klea: Glory or fame; that which others say about one, particularly after one’s death. Kleos is what epic conveys upon its heroes. The phrase kleos apthiton, “imperishable glory,” exactly parallels the Sanskrit sravas aksitam and may reflect an original Indo-European poetic phrase for imperishable glory.

mēnis: Wrath; the first word of the Iliad, where it refers especially to Achilles’ anger. Elsewhere in Homer, the word is used only in association with gods.

mētis: Wisdom, skill, cunning, craftiness. Odysseus’ most common epithet is polu-mētis, “of much mētis.”

Mycenean culture: The name given by archaeologists to the prehistoric Bronze Age culture discovered by 19th-century archaeologists.

Myrmidons: Soldiers under the command of Achilles.

nēktar: The drink of the gods. See also ambrosia.

Nekuia: Odysseus’ visit to the Underworld, Od. XI. The scene that opens Od. XXIV, which shows the souls of the suitors arriving in Hades, is often called “the second Nekuia.”

nostos: Return or homecoming. Throughout the Odyssey, Odysseus strives for his own nostos and the nostos of his companions. Some scholars think that nostos-poetry was a whole subcategory of epic, to which the Odyssey belonged. One poem of the Epic Cycle was entitled Nostoi, or returns. The English word nostalgia literally means “longing for return/homecoming.”

Ogygia: The island of the nymph Kalypso, where Odysseus was held captive for seven years.

polu-tropos: “Of many turns.” This ambiguous epithet, used to identify Odysseus in the first line of the Odyssey, refers both to his wanderings and to his cleverness.
proem: The opening lines of an epic, which introduce the main theme of the poem.

psyche: Often translated as “soul,” this word originally seems to have meant “breath.” It is what leaves the body at death. Though it survives in some sense in Hades, its existence there is vague and shadowy.

Scheria: The island of the Phaiakians, where Odysseus is treated with marvelous xenia.

Telemachy: The first four books of the Odyssey, which concentrate on Odysseus’ son Telemachos.

thnêtoi: “The dying ones.” A term used to refer to human beings, particularly as contrasted to the immortal gods, or thanatoi.

thrift: In discussing Homeric verse, this refers to the fact that different phrases used to describe one character will occupy different metrical positions in the line. Sometimes also called “economy.”

timê: Honor, especially the external, visible tokens of honor bestowed on a warrior by his peers. See also geras.

type scenes: Standardized scenes that are repeated with minimal variation in the epics. They include short, fixed descriptions of feasting, of setting sail, etc., as well as longer and more flexible accounts of battle. See also aristeia.

xenia: “The guest/host relationship.” Our term “hospitality” does not adequately convey the seriousness of the concept. Xenia was protected by Zeus, and covers the whole range of obligations that guests and hosts (xenoi, see next entry) have to one another. Violations of these obligations bring dire consequences: Paris’ theft of Helen was, among other things, a violation of xenia, as are the suitors’ actions throughout the Odyssey.

xenos: A guest, host, friend, stranger, or foreigner (cf. xenophobia). The range of this word’s meanings reflects the essential nature of xenia (see previous entry), which does not depend upon prior acquaintance but operates between strangers. Once two men have entered into a relationship of xenia by one of them staying in the other’s house, they are “guest-friends” and have obligations to one another.

Unitarians: Scholars who believe that the Homeric epics were composed in their present form by one poet, not assembled from various much shorter poems.
Biographical Notes

I. Real People

Blegen, Carl (1887–1971). American archaeologist, who directed the University of Cincinnati’s excavations at Troy (Hisarlik) from 1932 to 1938. He argued strongly that Troy VIIa, from c. 1250 BC, should be identified as Homer’s Troy.

Calvert, Frank (1928–1980). A British citizen who lived in the Troad (and worked as American consul). His family owned part of Hisarlik, and Calvert probably directed Schliemann’s attention to it as the most likely site of Troy. Calvert had done some trial excavating in 1865, before Schliemann arrived in Turkey, and perhaps should be recognized as the actual discoverer of Troy.

Dörpfeld, Wilhelm (1853–1940). Schliemann’s successor as excavator of Troy and Mycenae. He thought that Homer’s Troy should be identified with Troy VI (c. 1300).

Homer (c. 700 BCE?). The name traditionally given to the bard of the Iliad and the Odyssey. But there is little to no agreement about when or where such a person lived, or even if it is reasonable to refer to one bard for the epics at all.


Parry, Milman (1902–1935). An American scholar whose 1928 doctoral dissertation for the University of Paris was the first clear demonstration of the importance of formulas and oral compositional techniques in the Homeric epics. Just before his early death, he was engaged in fieldwork on oral poetics in Yugoslavia, where he traveled in 1933 and 1934–35.

Schliemann, Heinrich (1822–1890). German archaeologist; the “discoverer of Troy” and excavator of Mycenae. He began excavations at Hisarlik in 1871 and discovered the “Treasure of Priam” in 1873. From 1874–1876 he ran excavations in Greece, notably at Mycenae and Orchomenos, and returned to Troy in April 1876. Though he did not understand the complexity or age of the ruins he excavated, misidentifying Troy II (c. 2200 BC) as Homer’s Troy, Schliemann deserves great credit for his pioneering work.

Wolf, Friedrich August (1759–1824). Author of Prolegomena to Homer (1795), which gave rise to the 19th-century controversy over “the Homeric Question.”
II. Epic Characters: Humans, Monsters, and Gods

(Note on transliteration of names: With one exception, I have followed the transliteration used in Richmond Lattimore’s translations, since those are the versions I recommend that students buy. The one exception is the name Achilles. While “Achilleus” is certainly more correct, “Achilles” has become the standard English spelling to such a degree that I find it hard to adjust to any other.)

Achilles. Greatest Greek warrior. His withdrawal from battle because Agamemnon takes his concubine Briseis, and his subsequent return to avenge the death of his friend Patroklos, form the framework of the Iliad.

Agamemnon. Commander-in-chief of the Greek forces. Brother of Menelaos; husband of Klytaimestra. In the Iliad, his initial refusal to surrender his concubine Chryseis and subsequent appropriation of Achilles’ concubine Briseis motivate Achilles’ withdrawal from battle. In the Odyssey, the story of his murder by Aigisthos and Klytaimestra, and the vengeance taken by his son Orestes, is frequently cited as a parallel to Odysseus’ family situation.

Aigisthos. Cousin of Agamemnon and Menelaos, who seduces Klytaimestra while Agamemnon is away at war. He murders Agamemnon upon his return from Troy, and is himself killed by Agamemnon’s son Orestes. This story is frequently cited in the Odyssey as a parallel to Odysseus’ family situation.

Aiolos. The “king of the winds.” He gives Odysseus a bag with all the contrary winds in it, but unfortunately the companions open the bag just before they reach Ithaka.

Aias the Greater. Son of Telamon; the greatest Greek warrior after Achilles. He figures prominently in the Iliad. According to the Epic Cycle, he committed suicide out of shame after the Greeks voted to ward the dead Achilles’ armor to Odysseus rather than to him. His ghost is still angry over this slight when it appears in Od. XI and refuses to speak to Odysseus. (His name may be more familiar in the Latinized form Ajax.)

Aias the Lesser. Son of Oïleus. He raped Kassandra in Athena’s temple during the Sack of Troy, thus bringing down Athena’s anger on all the Greeks. Menelaos recounts how he was drowned by Poseidon (Od. IV).

Alexandros. See Paris.

Alkinoos. King of the Phaiakians, husband of Arete, father of Nausikaa.

Andromache. Wife of Hektor, mother of Astyanax. She appears several times in the Iliad, most notably in her conversation with Hektor (II. VI) and her lament over his corpse (II. XXIV).

Antikleia. Odysseus’ mother, whose ghost he sees in the Nekuia.
Antinoos. With Eurymachos, one of the two ringleaders of the suitors. The first suitor to be killed by Odysseus (Od. XXII).

Aphrodite. Daughter of Zeus and Dione; wife of Hephaistos (in the Odyssey, though not in the Iliad); mother (by the mortal Anchises) of the Trojan Aeneas; lover of Ares. Goddess of sexual passion. She motivates Paris’ abduction of Helen. Favors the Trojans.

Apollo. Son of Zeus and Leto, twin brother of Artemis. In the Iliad, he appears mainly as the god of prophecy and as the bringer of plague and sudden death. Later authors would stress his association with reason, healing, and music. His identification with the sun is much later than Homer.

Ares. Son of Zeus and Hera; god of war; particularly associated with the physical, bloody, distressing aspects of war (cf. Athena).


Argos. 1) Agamemnon’s city. 2) Odysseus’ old dog, who dies upon seeing his master (Od. XVII).

Artemis. Daughter of Zeus and Leto; twin sister of Apollo. A virgin goddess. She is the patron of hunters, of wild animals, and girls before their marriage. She brings sudden death to women. Her identification with the moon is later than Homer.

Astyanax. Baby son of Hektor and Andromache; appears with his parents in II. VI. During the Sack of Troy, he is thrown from the walls of the city and killed.

Athena. Daughter of Zeus, who sprang from his brow fully grown and wearing armor. She is the goddess of warfare in its nobler aspects (cf. Ares). A virgin goddess, she is associated with wisdom, cleverness, and weaving. In the Odyssey, she appears as Odysseus’ special patron. Usually favors the Greeks, but becomes enraged with them during the Sack of Troy.

Briseis. Achilles’ concubine and geras. Agamemnon’s taking her motivates Achilles’ withdrawal from battle in II. I.

Charybdis. A very dangerous whirlpool, personified as a female entity. Odysseus has to sail between her and Skylla.

Chryses. An old priest of Apollo. Agamemnon’s refusal to return his daughter Chryseis motivates the opening episode of the Iliad.

Chryseis. Daughter of Chryses; concubine and geras of Agamemnon. His refusal to return her to her father motivates the opening episode of the Iliad.

Circe (Kirke). Goddess, daughter of Helios the sun-god, enchantress. She turns half of Odysseus’ companions into swine. Odysseus spends one year with her as her lover.

Demodokos. The bard of the Phaiakians, who sings three songs in Od. VIII.
Diomedes. A Greek warrior, who wounds Ares and Aphrodite during his aristeia in Iliad V. Exchanges armor as a token of xenia with Glaukos (Il. VI).

Eumaios. Odysseus’ swineherd, who remains loyal to his master. The disguised Odysseus goes to his hut and receives xenia from him in Od. XIV. Eumaios fights with Odysseus and Telemachos to defeat the suitors.

Eumaios. A young Phaiakan, son of Alkinoos, who insults Odysseus by saying he does not look like an athlete.

Eumaios. Odysseus’ and Telemachos’ old nurse. She recognizes Odysseus by the scar on his thigh (Od. XIX).

Eurylochos. Odysseus’ second-in-command; often opposes or argues against Odysseus’ commands. Encourages his companions to kill and eat Helios’ cattle (Od. XII).

Eurymachos. With Antinoos, one of the two ringleaders of the suitors; his words to the seer Halitherses in Od. II illustrate the suitors’ rejections of their society’s most important mores.

Eurynome. Odysseus’ and Penelope’s housekeeper.

Glaukos. Trojan ally, close friend of Sarpedon. Exchanges armor with Diomedes as a token of xenia (Il. VI).

Hades. Brother of Zeus, husband of Persephone. Ruler of the Underworld (Tartaros), which comes to be called Hades after him.

Halitherses. Ithakan seer, who tries to reason with the suitors in Od. II.

Hekabe. Queen of Troy, wife of Priam, mother of Hektor, Paris, and Cassandra. (May be more familiar in the Latinized spelling of her name, “Hecuba.”)

Hektor. Crown prince of Troy, son of Priam and Hekabe, husband of Andromache, father of Astyanax. He kills Patroklos and is killed by Achilles.

Helen. Daughter of Zeus and Leda, sister of Klytaimestra, wife of Menelaos; the most beautiful woman in the world. Her seduction (or kidnapping?) by Paris is the cause of the Trojan War.

Helios. The sun god. Father of Circe. Owner of the cattle on the island Thrinakia, which Odysseus’ companions eat although they have been warned not to do so.

Hephaistos. Son of Zeus and Hera, or perhaps of Hera alone. In the Iliad, he is married to Charis; in the Odyssey, to Aphrodite. He is lame and ugly. The smith-god, who forges Achilles’ new armor in Iliad XVIII and to some extent represents fire itself.

Hera. Wife and sister of Zeus, mother of Hephaistos and Ares. She is the patron goddess of marriage and married women. In the Iliad, hates the Trojans and favors the Greeks.
Herakles. Greatest Greek hero, son of Zeus and the mortal woman Alkmene. He lived (probably) two generations before the Trojan War. He is cited as a paradigm of the hero throughout both epics; Odysseus speaks to his spirit in the Underworld (Od. XI).

Kalchas. Seer/soothsayer for Agamemnon and the entire Greek army.

Kalypso. Nymph (or minor goddess) who keeps Odysseus captive on her island Ogygia for seven years.

Kassandra. Daughter of Priam and Hekabe; sister of Hektor and Paris. During the Sack of Troy, Aias the Lesser rapes her in the temple of Athena. This outrage motivates the goddess’ anger at the Greeks.

Klytaimestra. Wife of Agamemnon, mother of Orestes, half-sister of Helen. She takes Aigisthos as her lover while Agamemnon is away at Troy, and assists Aigisthos in murdering him upon his return. This story is frequently cited in the Odyssey as a parallel to Odysseus’ family situation.

Laertes. Father of Odysseus, father-in-law of Penelope, grandfather of Telemachos. Appears in Od. XXIV.

Laistrygones. Monstrous cannibals who destroy eleven of Odysseus’ twelve ships (Od. X).

Leodes. Young suitor, the first to try to string Odysseus’ bow.

Lykaon. Young son of Priam; half-brother of Paris and Hektor. He fruitlessly begs Achilles for mercy in Il. XXI.

Medon. Odysseus’ herald, who served the suitors unwillingly. Odysseus spares his life at Telemachos’ request.

Melanthios. Odysseus’ goatherd, who is disloyal to his master; brother of Melantho. He brings armor and weapons to the suitors in Od. XXII.

Melantho. One of Odysseus’ slavewomen, disloyal to her master; lover of Eurymachos; sister of Melanthios.

Menelaos. Brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen. Prominent figure in the Iliad; appears briefly in Od. IV.

Nausikaa. Young Phaiakian princess who befriends Odysseus when he washes up on the shores of Scheria (Od. VI).

Nestor. Oldest and wisest of the Greeks; appears in both the Iliad and (briefly) in Od. III.

Odysseus. Husband of Penelope, father of Telemachos, son of Laertes and Anticleia. Cleverest and craftiest of the Greeks; an important character in the Iliad, where he takes part in the Embassy to Achilles (Il. IX). Main character of the Odyssey.
Orestes. Son of Agamemnon and Klytaimestra. He avenges his father’s murder by killing Aigisthos and Klytaimestra. This story is frequently cited in the *Odyssey* as a parallel to Odysseus’ family situation.

Outis: “Nobody,” or “Noman,” the name by which Odysseus identifies himself to the Cyclops Polyphemos.

Paris (also called Alexandros). Son of Priam and Hekabe, brother of Hektor; prince of Troy. His abduction or perhaps seduction of Helen from her husband Menelaos motivates the Trojan War.

Patroklos. Achilles’ dearest friend, who goes into battle wearing Achilles’ armor and is killed by Hektor.

Peleus. Achilles’ father; husband of Thetis. He does not appear in the *Iliad*, but is alluded to very frequently.

Penelope. Wife of Odysseus, mother of Telemachos. One of the main themes of the *Odyssey* is her courting by 108 suitors and the difficulties this causes her. The question of whether or not she will remain faithful to Odysseus permeates the epic.

Persephone. Wife of Hades, queen of the Underworld.

Phemios. Odysseus’ bard, who served the suitors unwillingly. Odysseus spares his life at Telemachos’ request.

Philoktetes. The greatest Greek archer in the Trojan War. Odysseus says that he himself was “second only to Philoktetes” as an archer (*Od*. VIII).

Philoitios. Odysseus’ cowherd, who is loyal to his master. He fights with Odysseus and Telemachos to defeat the suitors in *Od*. XXII.

Phoinix. Achilles’ old “foster-father,” takes part in the Embassy to Achilles in *Il*. IX.


Poseidon. Brother of Zeus, god of the sea. In the *Iliad* he favors the Greeks; in the *Odyssey* he hates Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemos.


Sarpedon. Trojan ally from Lykia, son of Zeus. Close friend of Glaukos. He is killed by Patroklos in *Il*. XVI.

Skamandros. A river of Troy; personified, it battles Achilles in *Il*. XXI.

Skylla. A six-headed, human-devouring monster. Odysseus has to sail between her and Charybdis.
Teiresias. The great Theban seer whose spirit Odysseus consults in the Underworld (Od. IX).

Telemachos. Son of Odysseus and Penelope. The first four books of the Odyssey (the Telemachy) focus on him. In Books XVI–XXIV, he helps his father defeat the suitors.

Thetis. Sea-goddess; mother of Achilles; wife of Peleus.

Xanthos. 1) One of Achilles’ immortal horses, who speaks to him in a human voice at the end of Il. XIX. 2) Another name for Skamandros.

Bibliography

I. Essential Readings: A Selection of Translations of the Homeric Epics

Lattimore, Richmond, trans. The Iliad of Homer. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1951; The Odyssey of Homer. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991. These are my preferred translations for several reasons. First, Lattimore translates the Greek line by line; thus, line references to the original make sense for this translation as well. This is very helpful to the student who is reading supplementary materials that include line references. Second, Lattimore preserves Homer’s formulas in his translation; whenever Homer repeats precisely the same words, Lattimore repeats precisely the same words. This goes a long way toward preserving the “feel” of Homer in English. Third, Lattimore’s language is somewhat archaic and difficult sounding. Again, this is truer to the original than a more idiomatic rendering would be, since the dialect of the epics is itself an artificial, poetic dialect. Fourth, Lattimore’s meter consistently gives as adequate a sense of Homer’s hexameters as can well be done in English, and at times is magnificent.

Acknowledgment: Quotes in these lectures from The Iliad of Homer, translated by Richmond Lattimore, copyright 1951 by The University of Chicago, were used with permission by arrangement with The University of Chicago Press.

Fitzgerald, Robert. The Iliad. New York: Anchor Press, 1989; The Odyssey. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. Many people prefer these translations for their readability. They are very good modern English poetry; however, in my estimation they do not accurately convey the feeling of Homer’s style. Fitzgerald’s meter does not even attempt to convey the hexameter, and he does not preserve the formulas.

Fagles, Robert. The Iliad. New York: Penguin USA, 1998; The Odyssey. New York, Penguin USA, 1997. These new translations received a great deal of critical attention when they appeared, most of it very favorable. Although I prefer them to Fitzgerald’s versions, in my view they are marred by excessive use of colloquial language (e.g., phrases such as “cramping my style”). Similarly, Fagles’ meter does not capture the feeling of the Homeric hexameter.

II. Supplementary Readings

(Note: The amount of scholarly writing on Homer is staggering; hundreds of books have appeared in the past ten years alone. In fact, it is a common lament among classicists that no one individual could possibly be familiar with everything that has been written about Homer. Faced with this vast amount of scholarship, I have tried to winnow out a representative selection of useful and interesting studies. I have avoided books that assume knowledge either of Greek or of complicated modern theoretical approaches. I have also included several...
works that disagree, at least to some extent, with my own view of some of the
issues raised by the epics, so that students may gain some sense of the range of
possible interpretations that the epics elicit. Finally, I have tried to pick works
that have good bibliographies, to aid those students who wish to continue their
journey through the thickets of Homeric scholarship.)

Allen, Susan Hueck. *Finding the Walls of Troy: Frank Calvert and Heinrich
Schliemann at Hisarlik*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California
Press, 1999. A fascinating, well-written, and meticulously documented account
of the work and interactions of these two archaeologists, which argues that
Calvert deserves credit as the actual discoverer of Troy.

Austin, Norman. *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer’s
A well-written, detailed analysis of several key themes in the *Odyssey.*
Particularly interesting discussion of Odysseus’ and Penelope’s interactions
before and after the slaughter of the suitors.

———. *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom*. Ithaca and London:
Cornell University Press, 1994. Discusses Helen’s role in Homer and other
Greek authors, including the version of her story that said only a phantom went
to Troy. Explores Helen’s fundamental dual nature as both woman and goddess.

discussion, focusing on Odysseus’ relationship with Athena but covering many
important critical issues.

Cohen, Beth, ed. *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer’s
important essays spanning the disciplines of classics, history, and art history.

Doherty, Lillian Eileen. “Sirens, Muses, and Female Narrators in the *Odyssey*,”
in Cohen, *Distaff Side*, pp. 81–89. A thought-provoking examination of the
importance of the Sirens in the epic.

Hopkins University Press, 1987. A well-written discussion of some of the major
themes and issues of the *Iliad*. Includes detailed commentaries on several key
books.

University Press, 1996. A readable and entertaining account of the pioneering
archaeologists who excavated the most important Bronze Age sites.

detailed survey of all the sources of traditional Greek myths. The materials on
the Trojan War are in Vol. 2.

elegant, beautifully written discussion of Homer’s presentation of mortality.
Hölscher, Uvo. “Penelope and the Suitors,” in Schein, Reading the Odyssey, pp. 133–140. An examination of Penelope’s motivations for coming down to see the suitors in Odyssey XVIII.


Morrison, James V. Homeric Misdirection: False Predictions in the Iliad. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992. As the title indicates, this book examines false or misleading predictions in the Iliad and argues that they are a method for building suspense among an audience that already knows the basic outlines of the traditional story.

Nagler, Michael N. “Dread Goddess Revisited.” In Schein, Reading the Odyssey, pp. 141–161. An interesting analysis of Circe, Kalypso, and Penelope, with detailed discussion of the import of Odysseus and Penelope’s bed.


———. Greek Mythology and Poetics. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990. A collection of essays on a wide range of subjects, which examines Greek poetry and mythology in its wider Indo-European context, particularly through comparison with Indic mythology and poetics. Chapters 2 (Formula and Meter) and 4 (Patroklos, Concepts of Afterlife, and the Indic Triple Fire) are particularly relevant for this course.


Powell, Barry. *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. A highly controversial work, which argues that the alphabet’s adaptation for the Greek language was motivated by the desire to record the Homeric epics. This argument has not found wide acceptance among scholars, but the book is thought-provoking and lucidly written. It also provides a great deal of information about early non-alphabetic writing systems.


Shapiro, H. A. “Coming of Age in Phaiakia: The Meeting of Odysseus and Nausikaa,” in Cohen, *Distaff Side*, pp. 155–164. Compares Homer’s description of the Odysseus-Nausikaa scene with its representations in Athenian art of the 5th century BCE, and concludes that an implicit threat of rape was very much part of the 5th-century audience’s understanding of the scene.

Shay, Jonathan. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Athenaeum, 1994. A fascinating and deeply disturbing book. Dr. Shay, a psychiatrist who treats Vietnam veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, reads the *Iliad* against the background of those veterans’ experiences. The book contains a great deal of profanity (in quotations of veterans’ statements to Dr. Shay) and some extremely graphic descriptions of
combat violence, and so may not be appropriate for all students. But those who can stomach its uncompromising portrait of the reality of war will find it intensely thought-provoking.

Slatkin, Laura M. “Composition by Theme and the Mêtis of the Odyssey,” in Schein, Reading the Odyssey, pp. 223–237. Discusses the importance of the concept of mêtis for the narrative and thematic structure of the Odyssey.


Vernant, Jean-Pierre. “Death with Two Faces,” in Schein, Reading the Odyssey, pp. 55–61. A discussion of Homer’s depiction of death, with close attention to Achilles’ words to Odysseus in Odyssey XI.


Wood, Michael. In Search of the Trojan War. A fascinating, well-written, and well-documented examination of the evidence for the historicity of the Trojan War. Includes many illustrations, maps, etc.


Zeitlin, Froma I. “Figuring Fidelity in Homer’s Odyssey,” in Cohen, Distaff Side, pp. 117–152. An extremely detailed examination of the depiction of female fidelity in the Odyssey, focusing primarily on Odysseus’ and Penelope’s bed and its connections with the rest of the epic.