



Homer - The Iliad

(8th Century BC)

Context:

We know very little about Homer, who was regarded by the Greeks as their first and greatest poet. Evidence of how little we know about him is that no fewer than seven cities claim to have been his birthplace. Homer is thought to have lived between 850 and 750 BC. The Trojan War, which is the subject of his poem, took place c. 1250 BC, some 400 years before. A bard, who according to tradition was blind, Homer received the history of the war as part of an oral tradition handed down from one generation to the next. The *Iliad* is an epic *poem*, meant to be recited or rather sung aloud. One of the greatest war stories ever told, it is filled with scenes of battle and carnage. From this broad perspective, it is the story of a war between two peoples, the Greeks from the West and the Trojans from the East. But Homer's stated purpose is to sing of one man, Achilles, and the results of his choices. Insofar as the poem is about both, Achilles and the war between the two peoples, it gives us a hint of what all epics are about, a founding or a refounding. Epics are always about a people in the midst of some battle struggling to overcome something they don't understand or see very well. They typically bring into focus two worlds, a cosmic order of the gods and the temporal, largely political order of a people. At the center of some battle is an individual who either because of some divinely appointed task or divine burden is the instrument of issuing in a change which makes possible a greater attunement between the human and divine orders. The epic is always heroic precisely because of the magnitude of the burden the hero has to bear. The hero of this epic is Achilles.

As part of a *living* oral tradition, the epic made use of conventions that all of its listeners would have known. One of the more obvious was that the story began *en medias res*, that is, in the midst of things. Homer was counting on his audience already knowing all that preceded and all that came after his story, or he could not have begun where he did. It is important for our understanding of the poem to have some sense of the events leading up to the point where he begins, 9 ½ years into the war. On a human scale, the story began with the abduction of Helen, the wife of Menelaus. Paris, the son of Priam, king of Troy, fell in love with Helen while he was a guest of Menelaos and taking her with him, he returned to Troy. In retribution for the violation of both the marriage and the rules of hospitality, Agamemnon, Menelaus' brother, gathered an army of the Greek city-states and traveled over the Aegean Sea to lay siege to the city of Troy. On a divine scale, the roots of the conflict grew out of a contest in which Paris was asked to choose Hera, Athena, or Aphro-dite as the most beautiful goddess. He chose Aphrodite, and as a result both Hera and Athena bore a grudge against him. The gods are actively involved in this war, taking sides with either the Trojans or the Achaians. Hera and Athena, along with Poseidon, support the Achaians; Apollo, Ares, Artemis and Aphrodite support the Trojans. Zeus intervenes on both sides at various times as it suits his own high purposes.

Summary:

The poem opens with Homer's invocation of the goddess Calliope, Muse of the Epic Poem. She is one of the 9 daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus (memory impregnated by divine power).

Book I: begins 9 ½ years into the war. Before the story opens, in one of their many raids, the Greeks captured the small town of Chryse, and Agamemnon was given Chryseis, the daughter of Chryses, a priest of Apollo, as booty. When the story opens, the priest comes to the Achaians to ransom his daughter. Agamemnon refuses, and Apollo sends a plague on the Achaians for dishonoring his priest. Troubled by this turn of events, Achilles calls an assembly. During that assembly, Kalcas, the bird reader, reveals that the plague is due to Agamemnon's refusal and that Apollo will not lift it until the king returns Chryseis without ransom. Agamemnon becomes angry, and when Achilles confronts him, the king takes Briseis, Achilles' concubine, to replace the one he is forced to give up. Feeling dishonored, Achilles responds by withdrawing himself and all his men from the war. He appeals to his mother, the goddess Thetis, to restore his honor, and she in turn persuades Zeus to punish Agamemnon by helping the Trojans. Zeus consents. A whole divine order is put in motion in support of Achilles.

Book II: Zeus sets in motion his plan to restore Achilles' honor by sending Agamemnon a false dream that he will take Troy that day. Agamemnon tests his soldiers by telling them that Zeus is sending them back to Greece in shame. But his plan backfires, and they rush to put to sea for home. Odysseus restores order. The Greeks once again assemble. Thersites, "a man of many words but disorderly," attempts to persuade the Achaians to abandon the war and return home. Odysseus defeats him. Nestor offers sound advice. This chapter ends with a well recognized epic convention, a catalogue of the Trojan and Achaian forces.

Book III: The two armies face off, but rather than engage, they arrange a truce so that Paris and Menelaus, the two principles of the conflict, can engage in single combat with the winner to take Helen. While the two prepare, Helen ascends the Skian gate atop the walls of Troy where she points out the leaders of the Greeks to Priam. Just at that moment when Paris is in danger of being defeated, Aphrodite spirits him back behind the walls of Troy and to his bedroom, where he makes love to Helen.

By the terms of the truce, Helen should go to Menelaus, but Hera wants Troy defeated and so in **Book IV**, Athena persuades one of the Trojans to kill Menelaus to reignite the fighting. Pandaros, a Trojan archer, wounds Menelaos and the battle recommences.

Book V: describes the *aristeia* of Diomedes. Diomedes is unstoppable and he leads the Greeks in a day of battle that swings first to one side and then the other. The Book begins with Athene healing Diomedes' wound and lifting the 'mist' from his eyes so that he can see the gods on the field of battle. The gods actively join in the fighting, killing some and saving others. Diomedes attacks both Aphrodite and Ares as they help the Trojans. Ares complains to Zeus that the war and his wound are the fault of his 'accursed' daughter, Athene, but Zeus will hear none of his whining and rebuffs him.

The war continues to shift back and forth in **Book VI**. Diomedes encounters a guest-friend and for the sake of that friendship, they refuse to kill each other, exchanging shields as a sign. Hector leaves the field of battle to make an offering to Athena in hopes of gaining her aid. While he is within the walls of Troy, he rebukes Paris for remaining safe in the palace while Trojans die for his cause. He seeks out his wife, Andromache and his infant son, assuring her that she will never be taken as a slave as long as he lives.

Book VII: opens with Hector's return to the battle followed by Paris. He challenges the Achaians to choose someone for single combat. Aias is chosen but nightfall halts the duel before a winner is decided. The Trojans offer to return everything taken from Menelaos except Helen; the Achaians refuse the goods and Helen. Another truce is agreed upon so that each side may collect and bury their dead. On the advice of Nestor, the Achaians fortify their camp with a wall and a ditch during the truce. The Trojans meet in assembly.

Book VIII: reveals the further unfolding of Zeus' plan to make the Greeks suffer for Agamemnon's dishonor of Achilles when he forbids any of the other gods to interfere in the fighting while he himself

encourages the Trojans. At the end of the day, the Achaians retreat behind their fortifications and the Trojans make camp on the plain.

In **Book IX**, Realizing that shaming Achilles was a mistake that is costing the Greeks dearly, Agamemnon sends Aias, Odysseus, and Phoenix to appease him. They offer him generous gifts as well as the return of Brises but Achilles refuses their offers. Faced with the choice the gods have given him of dying there with great honor or returning to his home for a long comfortable life without honor, he would choose a long life rather than help Agamemnon. He plans to sail for home, and declares he will never enter the battle until Hector breaks the Achaian wall and reaches the ships.

Both sides decide to send spies out in the night in **Book X**. Diomedes and Odysseus capture Dolon, the Trojan scout, using what they learn from him to kill some of the Trojans allies and to steal booty.

Fighting resumes the next day in **Book XI**. Hector beats the Achaians back to their camp. Some of the greatest Greek warriors, Diomedes, Odysseus, and Agamemnon, are injured while Achilles, watching the fighting from his ship, nurses his wounded pride. Patroklos goes out to learn of the casualties and seeing him, Nestor pleads with him to join the battle without Achilles. He tells him if he puts on Achilles' armor, the Trojans will fall back in fear.

Hector's *aristeia* takes place in **Book XII**. The Trojans storm the Greek camp, and Hector breaks through the wall allowing them through to the beach.

In **Book XIII**, the battle continues on the beach as the Achaians strive to fight back the advance of the Trojans toward the ships, their only means of survival and passage home. Knowing Zeus is away, Poseidon takes advantage of his absence to encourage the Achaians. Aias stops Hector from pushing through the fortifications.

Alarmed at the turn of the battle and wanting to get her husband behind doors which only she can unlock, Hera seduces Zeus with the aid of Sleep and a love potion from Aphrodite. They make love here during the height of the battle. While Zeus sleeps, Poseidon works with the Greeks and the battle turns again in **Book XIV**.

Book XV opens with Zeus awakening. He reveals his plan to Hera and Poseidon is forced to withdraw. Following Zeus' command, Apollo restores the stunned Hector, who leads the Trojans through the Greek barricade where he plans to set fire to the ships.

The Trojans are clearly in the ascendancy. Achilles is moved by Patroklos' pity, and in **Book XVI** he gives Patroklos the use of his armor and men, but he warns him not to take the battle to the walls of Troy. Before Patroklos arrives, Hector finally gets past Aias and sets fire to the first ship, but once the Trojans see the armor of Achilles, they fall back. In battle fury and forgetting Achilles' warning, Patroklos pushes the Trojans back to the walls of their city. Apollo confronts and disarms him there and Hector kills him.

Book XVII describes the battle over the body of Patroklos and Achilles' armor. The Achaians manage to retrieve the body of Patroklos and get it back to the Achaian camp, but Hector keeps Achilles' armor.

In **Book XVIII**, Achilles grieves the death of Patroklos and, angry with himself for remaining outside the fighting too long, sets his quarrel with Agamemnon aside to avenge his friend. Thetis, his goddess mother, reminds him that if he rejoins the fighting, he himself will follow Hector's death with his own. Hephaestus, the god of craft, makes Achilles new armor with a shield on which is depicted the two cities of men: the city of war and the city of peace and justice.

Thetis and Odysseus both urge Achilles to make a formal reconciliation with Agamemnon at the opening of **Book XIX**. Achilles speaks to Agamemnon, telling him of his regrets in letting his anger rule him. Agamemnon places the blame for his own behavior on the gods for having deluded him and then offers Achilles gifts. Achilles says the gifts are of no consequence. He desires to take up the fight immediately. He performs a ritual dressing in his new armor, and just before taking the field, his horse Xanthos speaks a

prophecy, tell-ing Achilles his horses will keep him safe for a while, but he is soon to meet his death at the hands of “a great god and powerful Destiny.”

When Achilles returns to the battle in **Book XX**, Zeus gives all the gods permission to rejoin the fighting and a *psychomachia* ensues. The battle is a holocaust that sweeps up all of nature: the god of the dead awakens, the underworld gapes open, all the gods fight. Achilles kills everyone who faces him with the exception of Aeneas, who is saved by Poseidon, and Hector, who is saved by Apollo.

The Trojans’ retreat in **Book XXI** is hampered by the river, Xanthos. As Achilles fills it with bodies, the river rises against him in protest but is finally stopped by the fire of Hephaestus. Now the gods begin to turn openly against one another, with Athena defeating both Ares and Aphrodite and Hera boxing the ears of Artemis. Apollo deceives Achilles into pursuing him long enough for the Trojans to reach the city safely.

Reaching the city gates in **Book XXII**, Achilles finds Hector waiting for him. As Achilles approaches, Hector takes flight, aided by Apollo. Apollo finally leaves him, and when he does, Athene persuades Hector to turn and fight Achilles. Achilles kills Hector, and fastening his body to the chariot, he drags it back to the Achaian camp while Hector’s family watches from the walls. The ghost of Patroklos appears to Achilles in **Book XXIII**, asking why he has not been given a proper burial. The next day he is given an elaborate funeral followed by a day of funeral games.

Book XXIV opens eleven days after Hector’s death, his body still left unburied. Apollo has kept it safe from desecration or corruption and the gods tell Priam to go to Achilles to ransom his dead son. With the help of Hermes, the god of stealth who leads souls to the underworld, Priam goes under cover of night to seek out Achilles and ask for the return of Hector’s body. Achilles greets him courteously, and they grieve their losses together. Achilles has Hector’s body bathed and anointed and returns it to Priam, warning him to stay clear of Agamemnon and promising that there will be no fighting until the days of the funeral are completed. The poem ends on an elegiac note with the Trojans gathering their dead for Hector’s funeral.



Things To Think About When Reading The Poem

1. The war has been going on for 9 ½ years with neither side winning. Each side fights for a different set of values. Be aware of what is most honored by the Achaians and what by the Trojans.
2. Epics are about foundings. What are the values being fought for at the beginning of the epic? Watch to see if they are changed and if the changes taking place become the occasion for a new order, either in the men or the readers. Be aware of the value given to honor by both men and gods and how the concept of honor changes over the course of the book.
3. The epic struggle of a people doesn't take place in a vacuum; it occurs against the backdrop or rather in the midst of a cosmic order. And this cosmic order, the order of the gods, isn't just a setting; there is something going on within this order itself that's a part of the struggle the humans are facing. It brings into focus some aspect of the problem that isn't obvious at first. The importance of this cosmic order and the epic world it unfolds to us isn't small, then; it's enormous because to be aware of a cosmos is to be aware of ancient beginnings. When we enter a cosmos in which the gods play a part, we move into a world that takes us back to beginnings, to “the deeps of time” where boundaries or barriers as we know them fall away. We hear of an Olympos

where the gods dwell; an underworld where spirits go or are taken; a place called Tartarus. In book one, Zeus is described as taking a twelve day's journey to the ends of the ocean, that place where Okeanos, one of the fathers of the gods has been banished--it is at the ends of the world as we know it. And after Zeus agrees to Thetis's request to help recover the lost honor of her son, Achilles, Thetis "leapt down...down from shining Olympos into the sea's depth." Over and over again, we are reminded of a mythic world interpenetrating our own and yet fully real to itself just beyond our borders. Let this world have its full place as you read (cf. especially, XIV, 200ff; and XV, 185ff).

4. In an epic largely devoted to 'deeds,' Homer gives attention to several episodes in which words are shown to have an extraordinary power. As you read, think about the power of words vs. the power of deeds and which is greater.

Names and Terms

1. Epic: from the Greek *epos*, a word or story.
2. The poet or bard: The bard is a poet, a singer who moved from town to town telling his stories or remained at court in the service of his king. Many of the stories were drawn from history and myth that had been handed down from one generation to the next and so would have been familiar to their audiences. This passing on of stories from generation to generation is called the oral tradition. Homer, like the bards before him, would have received the stories of the Trojan War as part of that spoken heritage. Tradition tells us that Homer was blind. It may have been his inability to see with his eyes that gave him the vision to see beyond the battles to invisible things, things greater and more permanent
3. Invocation: a calling on the gods. When Homer begins by invoking the help of the Muse, Calliope (I, ll.1-7), he is drawing on mythic powers of the cosmos without which he cannot tell his tale. His subject involves something too great for him to tell by himself. What is so great about the war that it is deserving of divine help? Notice the several parts that make up the themes announced in the invocation: 1) Achilles' "anger" and its devastation; 2) the "will of Zeus" or Zeus's plan to recover Achilles' honor; and 3) the anger of Apollo who caused the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles.
4. Muse: Calliope, one of the 9 daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus (memory impregnated with divine power). Homer invokes her as the muse of epic poetry; she contains knowledge of all things past, particularly those associated with battle. The epic world is a world of the past, existing in memory and apparently closed off from the present.
5. *In medias res*: in the midst of things: this doesn't mean in the middle arithmetically; its meaning is rather in the midst of a crisis, some problem that is so great, so con-fusing, so painful, no one quite understands how to get out of it: in the midst of things. The fact that the story begins 9 ½ years into the war is not small. Neither side has been able to bring the conflict to a close, suggesting some underlying disorder is in the way. The story is about some change taking place in the interval between Achilles' withdrawal from the war and his return. 9 ½, remember, is almost 10, a number representing completion: as *The Iliad* begins, something is about to happen.
6. *Aristeia*: a special show of valor by an individual; he is perfect, unfailing and invincible in this state.
7. *Hubris*: pride; an over-reaching showing a failure to grasp human, natural limits.
8. There are two peoples fighting this war: the people of the West are the Achaians, Danaans, and Argives. The people of the East are the Trojans and the Dardanians. Be aware of the differences between them. Notice, for example, the way they enter the battles in Book III and their respective assemblies, Books I and VII. It will be helpful to keep the cast of major characters clear:

Achaian Warriors

Achilleus
Agamemnon Phoinix
Odysseus
Aias
Nestor
Diomedes
Menelaus

Patroklos
Idomeneus
Eumelo
Eurypylos
Antilochos

Trojan Warriors and People

Hector Andromache
Helen
Priam Hecabe
Aeneas Chryses
Poulydamus Cassandra
Sarpedon Briseis
Antenor Chryseis
Eukros Lykaon

9. The gods take sides and participate in the war. Zeus has his own plan and intervenes on both sides as it suits his purposes.

Achaian

Hera, Athena
Poseidon, Hermes (Argeiphontes)
Hephaistos

Zeus

Trojan

Apollo, Ares
Aphrodite, Artemis, Leto
Xanthos



Study Questions

1. What is the basis for the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles? How important is honor to each of them and how do they measure that honor? There also seem to be two different orders of power or authority at issue here: Agamemnon's authority derives from right of office, given by Zeus; Achilles' power as the greatest warrior rests on nature. How are women looked at (Book I, ll. 92-244)? Thetis, Achilles' goddess mother, was forced to marry a mortal so that Zeus could avoid the prophecy that a son born to the union of Thetis and Zeus would be stronger than his father. She, like her son, knows injustice and dishonor first hand. Yet when the other gods attempted to overthrow Zeus, it was Thetis who brought him aid. What does she ask of Zeus for her son and what is Zeus' response (ll. 495-530)?

2. After receiving a false dream from Zeus, Agamemnon wants to test his men by urging them to return home. The men make a stampede for the ships. How does Odysseus stop them (Book II, ll. 185-210)? He treats the kings and the common warriors differently. Why? Thersites tries to persuade them to go home. What are his arguments? How does he characterize Agamemnon (ll. 225-242)? Is he being truthful or is he distorting the truth to serve his own interests. What is Odysseus' response to Thersites? What is his argument to the Achaians (ll. 278-332)?

3. Look at the description of the two armies as they enter the battle. How are they different (Book III, ll. 1-9)? A truce is called so that the two principles, Menelaos and Paris, can end the war with a single combat. When Menelaos is about to defeat Paris, what happens to save him (ll. 373-394)? Aphrodite summons Helen to Paris' bed. What is Helen's response? How are we to understand Helen's attitude (ll. 399-447)?

4. Who is the first to break the truce (Book IV, ll. 85-170)? Notice again the ways in which the two armies enter into battle (ll. 419-445). What can you say about the differences between the two peoples?

5. Athene removes the "mist" from Diomedes' eyes, allowing him to see the gods on the battlefield, to distinguish between the mortal and the immortal warriors. When he returns to the fighting, what is peculiar about the way he battles? What does this say about his power (Book V, ll. 135-165)? What does Diomedes do as Aphrodite is rescuing Aineias? What does he say to her (ll. 330-351)? Having warned Diomedes not to attack any of the gods except Aphrodite, Athene now urges him to attack Ares. What are her reasons (ll. 825-834)?

6. Glaukos and Diomedes, Trojan and Achaian, meet and for a moment exchange stories that reveal a common heritage. Who is Bellerophon and how are the two rivals related to him (Book VI, ll. 146-211)? Who comes out ahead in the exchange that the two men make (ll. 232-236)? What is Hector's attitude toward Paris after Aphrodite takes him out of the fighting (ll. 280-285)? Hector returns to Troy to retrieve Paris, and while he is there he meets Andromache, his wife. What do we learn about Hector from this encounter (ll. 399-493)? How important is Hector to Andromache and why (ll. 410-430)?

--

7. In Book VII, a match is set up between Hector and Aias, but the contest is called because of darkness. What does it tell us about the power of the gods that night sets limits on the fighting (Book VII, ll. 280ff)? Here in Book VII, the Trojans hold an assembly that asks to be compared and contrasted with the Achaian assemblies in Books I and II. In their assembly, the Trojans discuss ending the war by returning Helen to Menelaos. What is Paris response (ll. 361-364)? What is Priam's response (ll. 365-378)? What does Priam's statement say about the relationship between the gods and men? How is the assembly of the Trojans different from the assemblies of the Achaians?

8. Zeus tells the gods to stay out of the battle. He dares them to let down a golden cord from Olympus and try to pull him down, saying not all of them together could accomplish it. What is the nature of the threat he holds against them (Book VIII, ll. 1-27)? With the gods out of the war, Hector begins to take command of the battle. What do we learn about Hector? How does he understand himself? His strength? His honor (ll.535-541)?

9. With the Achaians losing, Agamemnon sends Phoinix, Odysseus, and Aias to speak with Achilleus on his behalf. What is Agamemnon prepared to offer Achilleus to return to the fighting (Book IX, ll. 121ff)? What are the reasons each man offers Achilleus for returning and what are his replies (ll. 223-655)? Phoinix tells a story to support his argument. Who are Oineus and his son Melagros (ll.523-604)? What is the point of the story and why does Phoinix use it to try to persuade Achilleus to return to war? What light does it shed on honor? In his response to Odysseus, Achilleus had spoken of his own fate and made clear his sense that material gifts were an inadequate expression of honor (ll.405-420). When he answers Phoinix, he says, "Such honor is a thing I need not. I think I am honored already in Zeus' ordinance..." (ll. 606-609). What does he mean? Has his idea of honor changed since his argument with Agamemnon?

10. Odysseus and Diomedes volunteer to go out on a night raid. During the raid they encounter a Trojan scout, Dolon, and bargain with him. Do they keep their word? When they come to the sleeping Trojan camp, what do they do (Book X, ll. 468-514)?

--

11. In Book XI all the great Achaian warriors are either wounded or beaten back as Achilles watches from the ships. Agamemnon has his aristeia. How is he removed from the battle (Book XI, ll. 248ff)? Odysseus has a brief aristeia. What happens to remove him from the battle (ll. 450ff)? Nestor rescues someone from the fighting. Who does he rescue and why (ll. 504-515)? Achilles calls Patroklos to him and Homer makes the comment that “this was the beginning of his evil...” (l. 603). Why is this the beginning of his ‘evil’ and what is that evil?

12. Book XII begins with a time shift. Homer looks ahead to the 10th year when the city of Priam is taken. He describes Poseidon and Apollo taking counsel to destroy the wall that the Greeks had built, the gods putting things in their proper place (Book XII, ll. 1-35). The reason they will destroy it is that the Greeks built the wall without properly acknowledging the gods, but they will not take it down until Troy is defeated and the Greeks sail for home. Is there some connection between the defeat of Troy and the dismantling of the wall? Is there some impiety on both sides that the gods address? Glaukos and Sarpedon, two Trojan warriors, speak among themselves (ll. 310-327). They make clear the meaning of the established honor code, why it is the Lykians fight. Are there any ironies to the honor code from the reader’s perspective? Do these men see any irony?

13. In accordance with Zeus’ plan, the ascendancy of battle is shifting to the Trojans. But while Zeus is away, Poseidon sneaks in to keep the Achaians from being overwhelmed (Book XIII, ll. 339-360). What do we learn about the relationship between Zeus and Poseidon? The left side of the Trojan ranks is being badly defeated. Poulydamas comes to Hector and is critical of him (ll. 723ff). What is his criticism of Hector?

14. All of the wounded Achaian heroes gather around Agamemnon (Book XIV, ll. 45-135). What is Agamemnon’s counsel and what light does it throw on his treatment of Achilles in the beginning? In an effort to help the Achaians, Hera wants to seduce Zeus. What advantage does she have if she can get him into her chamber (ll. 153-169)? What help does she seek from Aphrodite? What lie does she tell Aphrodite in order to conceal her motives and why (ll.187-210)? In what is close to the center of the epic with the two armies locked in their most bitter battle, Hera and Zeus make love. It is a lyric moment. What is the response of ‘the divine earth’ beneath them to their lovemaking (ll. 346-352)? And why here when human casualties are so great?

15. Zeus finally reveals his whole plan (Book XV, ll. 59-77). From this, we understand his foreknowledge. How is Zeus like Homer? What can the two of them see that the men on the battlefield cannot? In responding to the command from Zeus that he not interfere with the battle, Poseidon recalls the genealogy of the gods (ll. 184-228). What do we learn from his response?

16. Patroklos is moved to help the Achaians. Achilles encourages him but with one condition. What is that condition (Book XVI, ll.80-96)? Why does Homer interrupt his narrative at this particular point to ask help from the Muses (ll.112)? Book XVI records Patroklos' aristeia. Sarpedon is the human son of Zeus. What happens when he meets Patroklos (ll. 418-461)? What are Zeus' responses to the fate that Sarpedon faces? What is Hera's answer to Zeus? What does Zeus do in response to the outcome of the battle between Patroklos and Sarpedon? Patroklos is moved to help the Achaians out of pity, but in ll. 685-687, he is described as "besotted." Does this suggest something about the nature of his pity? It takes three figures to kill Patroklos. Who are they? How does he die (ll. 698-836)?

17. The central importance of Patroklos for the entire story is clear: the whole of Book XVII is devoted to the struggle over his body. What happens to his body (ll. 715-753), and what happens to the armor of Achilles that he had been wearing (Book XVII, ll. 120-122)?

18. When Achilles receives the news of Patroklos' death, his mother knows his grief and leads a lamentation. But her lamentation is not for Patroklos. Why does his death weigh on her (Book XVIII, ll.52-60)? She goes to Achilles and mother and son have a tender exchange in which Achilles recalls that his captured armor was a gift from the gods to his father, Peleus, on the day they forced his mother into marriage with a mortal man (ll. 79-87). What hidden link between Achilles and his mother Thetis is revealed here? Without trying to dissuade him, Thetis reveals that his death is fated to follow soon after Hector's. How would you characterize Achilles at this moment (ll. 78-137)? In response to a crisis, Poulydamas again counsels Hector, urging him to return to the city. What is Hector's response to the advice (ll. 285ff)? Thetis goes to Hephaistos to ask him to make new armor

for Achilles. Pay close attention to all that he makes, especially the shield. There are two cities of men depicted on the shield (ll.490ff). What is the difference between the two?

19. Book XIX opens with Thetis placing the new armor at Achilles feet. This is the armor that his enemies will face, and no one has the courage to look at it. What is it in the armor that everyone is afraid to look at and only Achilles can see? Achilles and Agamemnon are reconciled. Characterize each of the two men at this moment. How does each of them understand what has led them to this point (ll. 40-275)? Achilles' ritual dressing begins with Athene dropping ambrosia, food of the immortals, into his heart (ll. 349ff). Notice each piece of armor that he puts on. How is Achilles presented here in his new armor? When he steps into his chariot, Achilles calls out to his horse, Xanthos, who answers him. What prophecy does Xanthos give (ll. 395-417)? Keeping in mind the necessity for all things to be in accord with the gods, why do you think that Homer put this prophecy in the mouth of his horse here on the threshold of his return to the battle?

20. The opening of Book XX signifies the importance of the moment. While the Achaians and the Trojans arm, Zeus summons all the gods and releases them to join the battle on whichever side they choose (ll. 1-75). A *psychomachia* (a war involving the whole universe, both inner and outer) is about to take place. 9 ½ years have been gathering to this moment. What is it about Achilles' return to the war that makes this moment so significant? Aineias is the first man to face Achilles. Homer takes great pains to describe his ancestry (ll. 200-247). What do we learn about Aineias? Remember Poseidon's words (ll. 293-308); they will be essential to understanding the *Aeneid*. When Hector and Achilles meet, how does Hector survive this first encounter (ll.419-454)?

21. Achilles comes across Lykaon, one of the sons of Priam and a man he had captured before and sold as a slave. Ransomed only 12 days earlier, Lykaon has just recovered his freedom; his return to "life" has been brief, and he begs for mercy. What is his plea (Book XXI, ll. 80-92)? What is Achilles response (ll. 99-119)? What irony is there in this scene? Each time Achilles tries to get out of the river, he is swamped. What do we learn about the honor code from Achilles' fear that he will die in the river (ll. 273-279)? The gods pair off to do battle (ll.342-520). Who battles whom? Who wins among the pairings? Think about what each of the gods represents. For example, Hera, goddess of the marriage bed and childbirth, battles Artemis, goddess of virginity and the hunt. Athene is the goddess of wisdom. Her brother and sister, Ares, the god of war, and Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and erotic love, are both gods of passion. What values are being affirmed in these Achaian victories?

22. Hector, the greatest of the Trojan warriors, runs from Achilles. Look at what he says to himself (Book XXII, l. 99-130). What do we learn about how he sees himself and what he fights for? Compare Hector's motives to Achilles'. What is Athene's role in the battle between Achilles and Hector (ll. 167-305)? What do we learn about Achilles from his words as he is about to kill Hector (ll. 320-374)? Book XXII ends with Andromache receiving the news of Hector's death (ll. 437-515). Characterize Andromache.

23. Achilles drags Hector's body back to the ships. That night the ghost of Patroklos appears to him. What do we learn about death and destiny from Patroklos' words (Book XXIII, ll. 69-107)? What do we learn about the Greek attitude toward death from the funeral rites (ll.138-183)? Achilles presides over funeral games in Patroklos' honor, bringing out prizes from his own possessions. What are the prizes (ll. 257-270)? Something happens in the Chariot Race that is an echo of the opening conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon; what is it and how does Achilles handle it (ll. 506-623)? Does this signal a change in the honor code and how men live it? If so, how does Homer signal this change?

24. A sense of loss hangs over Book XXIV. The Greeks have brought closure to a great suffering but Priam is without the body of his eldest son. What is the gods' response to Achilles keeping Hector's body (Book XXIV, ll. 22-93)? Zeus' messenger Iris goes to Priam with instructions to go to Achilles and ransom Hector's body. Describe the exchange between Priam and his wife Hecabe that follows (ll.200-227). Priam is the father of the man who killed Patroklos, Achilles' best friend; Achilles is the man who killed Priam's oldest son. How do these two men greet each other (ll. 475-551)? Do these two enemies bring the things they value (honor, power, piety) to this moment or do they set them aside? What moves them beyond the enmity of the battlefield? After he gives the body up, Achilles makes a prayerful appeal to Patroklos. What does this tell us about Achilles' sense of honor (ll. 592-95)? At the end of the *Iliad*, Hector, the best of the Trojans, is dead and Achilles is still alive. The closing lines of the epic strike an elegiac note with a series of lamentations by Andromache, Hecabe, Helen, and Priam. Each is deeply personal, but they speak of more than just their personal loss. What do we know from the end of the *Iliad* (ll.723-781)?

--

25. Homer is going to tell a story that is not just about men but about the gods as well, a story in which the divine order intervenes on man's behalf. Because he will need the assent and help of the gods to tell the story, Homer begins with an Invocation to the muse, Calliope. *The Bible* tells of God's interaction with men in a variety of ways; the *Gospels* in particular tell of His intervention on our behalf. Could they have been written without divine help? How is *The Iliad* similar to and different from the *Bible*?

26. Zeus has a plan to honor Achilles, but that plan is not clear to the men fighting the war. To bring about his plan, Zeus allows things to happen: Hector gains tremendous glory as a warrior, Patroklos dies, even his own son, Sarpedon, dies. Paul speaks of God's eternal purpose (*Ephesians 3:7*). Are there parallels in the working out of Zeus' plan and the unfolding of God's plan for us?

27. Like all epics, *The Iliad* is about the founding of a new order. The *New Testament* can be seen as a founding and a refounding of a people. The condition for that refounding in the *New Testament* is Christ's crucifixion. Is there any way in which we can say that Achilles' death is the condition for the refounding in *The Iliad*?

28. The quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles is a conflict between two different orders of authority: Agamemnon is the king, he holds the authority of office; Achilles is the greatest warrior, his is the authority of nature. Are there parallels to be drawn with some of the conflicts in the Bible (e.g. Pharaoh vs. Moses, Saul vs. David, the Pharisees vs. Christ)? With people who have been treated unjustly going up against their bosses?

29. The Trojans, the people of the East, are very different from the Achaians, the people of the West. We see it in their assemblies; we also see it in what motivates them to fight. The Trojans are tribal; they act on the arbitrary dictates of chance, the accidents of the bloodline. Hector defends Paris not because he's right but

because he is his brother. The quarrels between men of the West, on the other hand, arise out of some sense of right, of truth or wisdom, and they require personal choice. Hector does not face questions of right or wrong or personal choice; his participation in the battles is determined for him by his relationship to Paris. But Achilles must not only consider right and wrong, he must accept responsibility for the consequences of his decisions, knowing that they are the results of his own choices. Of the two ways of standing toward life and responsibility, which is closer to the Christian?

30. After His resurrection, the disciples ‘put on Christ’ and literally gave their lives for Him. What are the motives of the disciples? In *The Iliad*, both Patroklos and Hector put on Achilles’ armor. What are their motives? How do they differ? What happens to them and why?

31. Looking at the sense of honor for the Greeks, the value it has for them and the cost they are willing to pay for it, is it possible to see it as a precursor of the love that Christ made possible for Christians? How is it different?

32. The Church speaks of all that Christ brings about in terms of “the fullness of time.” *The Iliad* begins in the 9th and a half-year and all that happens involving Achilles to bring the story to its completion in the tenth year can be called, in terms of the epic, “the fullness of time.” In what ways is Achilles a prefiguring of Christ? In what ways not?



Questions on Language and Form

1. None of the warriors on the battlefield are aware of Zeus' will or his plans to bring that will about. Homer sees what they cannot see. What does he see and how important is what he sees to his listeners or readers?

2. In spite of our experience of time, that it 'flies' when we are enjoying ourselves and 'drags' when we are anxious or bored, modern man thinks of time as linear, with minutes equally spaced through the hours and days. The epic belongs to a "mythic" past, only available to us in story, no longer subject to 'real time.' For Homer, time is only as real as the significance of the events that make it up. Time is organized around great deeds, and the farther it gets away from those deeds, the more it slips into chaos and disorder. How does Homer use time to structure the *Iliad*? How is what he does the same or different from what Herodotus does?

3. Homer makes use of a number of epic conventions, the invocation, *en medias res*, cataloguing, to name a few we've already seen. Two having to do with language are of particular importance. One is his use of metaphors and similes (describing one thing in terms of another and by means of "like" or "as." Typically, the frame of reference for these is nature (cf., IV, 130-131; IV, 452-456). Another is his use of epithets, phrases used to describe characters: "swift-footed Achilles," "Ox-eyed Hera," "grey-eyed Athena," Thetis "the silver footed." One obvious use of these is mnemonic; they help the bard to remember. What is another?



Reflection Questions

1. The *Iliad* is an epic filled with ‘deeds.’ Having read it through, would you say words or deeds are more powerful? What can Homer do with words that Achilles cannot do with all his power? What does Achilles do that Homer cannot?
2. The epic opens on the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles over the material signs of personal honor and ends with the reverse: Achilles giving away material goods and settling disputes. How has Achilles changed? Do you think that his actions have redefined honor?
3. From the abduction of Helen to the fall of Troy, the history of the Trojan War was familiar to the Greeks and part of the repertoire of all their bards. The war lasted for 10 years and there were 10 years worth of heroic deeds to sing about. Why do you think that Homer chose to focus on this brief period, 9 ½ years into the war? We know from the Invocation that Homer will be singing of the anger of Achilles and its consequences; we know from the title of the poem that it is about Troy; but we get no details on the beginning of the war and the *Iliad* ends before the fall of Troy, even before the prophesied death of Achilles. Homer uses the traditional stories to tell us something more than tales of heroes and battles. What does Homer, the blind poet, see that those embroiled in the conflict do not?