



WORLD LITERATURE I (ENG 251)

Homer Study Guide

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Introduction to Homer and Troy	Epics of the Troy Cycle	Characters of the Troy Cycle	Story of the Troy Cycle	Oral Poetry, Oral Formulas, Rhapsodes
Odysseus' Adventures	Introduction to the <i>Iliad</i>	Iliad Summaries	Odyssey Summaries	

The Table of Contents above will guide you to useful background information about Homer, Troy, the Troy Cycle, Epic poetry, and the *Iliad* as well as the *Odyssey*. I encourage you to read through all of this material before you begin to read the *Odyssey*. The information on the Troy Cycle will give you a context for the *Odyssey*--it was only one of several epics about the Trojan War.

I suggest reading through the lists of characters in advance to get your bearings before plunging into the text. You can return to these lists as you read Homer. Because the story of the *Iliad* (a battle at Troy) precedes that of the *Odyssey* (a Greek veteran of the Trojan War wandering home), it really helps to get some familiarity with the *Iliad* before reading the *Odyssey*.

In the first yellow box below, I have links to several different summaries of the *Iliad*. In order to appreciate the long tradition of Troy stories to follow, it is very important to have a firm grasp of who is doing what to whom and why in the *Iliad*.

I have included a list of summaries of the *Odyssey* in the second yellow box below. I suggest selecting and reading a summary first and then reading Homer.

Summaries of the *Iliad*:

ClassicNote on the <i>Iliad</i>	a long, detailed summary of each book, with analysis; a few annoying ads, but pretty good overall
A Humanities Course from Reed College	a great deal of useful information on the <i>Iliad</i> , including a thorough summary of the events of each book.
Homer, <i>Iliad</i>, Plot Summary and Discussion Issues	A clear, fairly concise, nicely done summary and discussion.

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Summaries of the *Odyssey*

ClassicNote on the <i>Odyssey</i>	a long, detailed summary of each book, with analysis; a few annoying ads, but pretty good overall
Study Guide for Homer's <i>Odyssey</i>	detailed plot summary with analysis and some hypertext links to more information; by Robin Mitchell-Boyask , Temple University
Odysseus	a cute retelling of the <i>Odyssey</i> from Mythweb; Illustrated by Mark Fiore; Text by Joel Skidmore; includes a short version as well as a more detailed version that also includes some informative hyperlinks

Homer and Troy

Homer is the main reason we still know about the war at Troy. He composed two magnificent epic poems about the Trojan War, the Iliad and the Odyssey, around the eighth century BCE. This was about five hundred years after the war may have taken place. Probably one reason that the Trojan War became so important to later Greeks such as Homer was that they considered the Greek victors their ancestors. Another reason was that the Trojan War, if it occurred, came at the time that the Mycenaean Bronze Age collapsed. Thus, its fall represented, at least in story, the last great victory of the Mycenaean Greeks before the collapse of their civilization. Homer lived in a less glorious age. Although Greeks had colonized Asia Minor after the Trojan War, they were no longer as prosperous (or as piratical) as during the Bronze Age. There still was a town of Troy in Homer's day, and Homer may have lived in the vicinity, earning his living by telling stories about the glorious past of the Greek conquerors.

Homer was said to be blind, but his vivid images and stories of Troy have survived and thrived for nearly three millennia. Homer's Troy is a mixture of some fairly accurate details of the Bronze Age, mixed with details from his own time, and bound together by poetic imagination and elegant, swift-moving language. The Iliad and Odyssey have been so frequently praised, criticized, translated, borrowed from, adapted and imitated that a study of Homer and his literary descendants can easily become a study of the history of Western literary culture, from Troy to the twenty-first century. People have continued to read and imitate Homer because he was a wonderful poet.

The Iliad is the poem of Troy; it takes place in the Greek camp, below the walls of Troy, and within the city itself. It is the ninth year of a ten year siege. Achilles, a Greek leader and hero, quarrels with Agamemnon, the high king of the Greek army. They fight over women war-prizes—Chryseis and Briseis. Achilles pushes Agamemnon to return his war-prize woman, Chryseis, to her father, a priest of Apollo, in order to stop plague in the Greek camp. Agamemnon, furious, takes Achilles' war-prize woman, Briseis, as his compensation. Achilles, even more furious, vows to stop fighting until the Trojan warriors push through the Greek camp up to their ships at the shore. Achilles also gets his goddess mother, Thetis, to petition Zeus to keep the Trojans killing the Greeks until this happens. Zeus agrees and the game is set. Many Greeks are killed, Achilles sulks in his tent, finally Achilles' best friend Patroclus is killed and then at last Achilles rampages, slaughtering Trojans. Even the gods get into the battle, fighting one another until Zeus declares a stop to the chaos. The poem ends rather peacefully with two funerals, one for Hector, who killed Achilles' friend Patroclus, and one for Patroclus. Soon Achilles will die; next year Troy will fall.

Clearly, Achilles and Agamemnon are not suitable role models for more civilized societies, and this became a problem for later generations. Even worse, stories of the gods quarreling and even engaging in wild battles, became unacceptable to more pious generations. And Homer's vision of the relationship of mortals to gods is chilling—to Zeus, human beings are like the poppies of the field, they bloom briefly and die. The gods are rather like spectators betting on a violent football game that gets out of hand until Zeus finally calls an end to it. But Homer's language, the power of the narrative, and Achilles' heroic character are unforgettable, and have not only survived, but flourished, carrying memories of Troy into the twenty-first century.

Homer's Greeks are winners; his Trojans, losers, yet the Trojans and Greeks share many traits, such as the love of warfare, excellence, gold, adventure, trade, women, and horses. In the Iliad, Trojans often seem more civilized than the Greeks. Priam is a better king and father than Agamemnon; Hector a kinder man than Achilles; Andromache a far better wife than Helen. Nonetheless, Homer's Troy is not Greek. Priam is an oriental ruler who has fifty sons and twelve daughters, some by his wife, Hecuba, and many by his concubines in an oriental harem.

There is something exotic and decadent about Troy. The Trojans are not as politically astute, nor as aggressive, as the Greeks. Paris is a no-brain fop, but the Trojans allow him to act in ways that are disastrous for their city. Helen is pure trouble, yet the Trojans let her stay, even though her presence dooms them. Hector is the finest Trojan warrior, yet in his final test of will against Achilles, Hector breaks and tries to run away. Troy is rich, ancient, past its prime, even effete, an oriental kingdom to admire and plunder.

Even the gods have decided that Troy is ripe to fall. Zeus is ultimately on the side of the Greeks. Elsewhere in the Troy Cycle, there are stories of Priam's father, King Laomedon, who was mean spirited and politically foolish. He tried to avoid paying his debt to the gods and refused hospitality to Jason and Hercules. Troy, for all its power and elegance, has smudges on its reputation. Excellence, and therefore victory, is clearly on the side of the Greeks.

However, the Trojans must display sufficient excellence to provide glory to their conquerors. And so they do. Indeed, they are good enough to inspire later civilizations to make them into *their* ancestral heroes. This is a wonderful irony of the Troy stories--the winners become transmuted into losers, the losers into winners, in the great culture wars of later civilizations.

Epics of the Troy Cycle

There were originally eight epics in the cycle, which is often referred to as The Epic Cycle. I am calling it the Troy Cycle because the central event is the Trojan War. The entire Epic or Troy Cycle began with the primal marriage of Heaven and Earth and told the stories of Greek mythology down to the deaths of the Greek heroes of the Trojan War. Together these epics dealt with all the matter of Troy from the judgment of Paris to the death of Odysseus and his sons' marriages. All but the Iliad, the Odyssey, and a few fragments of the others are now lost, but the epics were listed and summarized by Proclus in later antiquity.

The Eight Troy Epics

Cypria	the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, the quarrel of the gods and goddesses, the judgment of Paris, the rape of Helen, and the beginnings of the Trojan War
Iliad	the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in the ninth year of the siege of Troy, the death of Hector
Aethiopis	the war to the death of Achilles
Little Iliad	the last part of the war
Sack of Troy	the end of the war
Returns	the Greek heroes, except Odysseus, return home
Odyssey	Odysseus returns home after 10 years' wandering
Telegonia	later adventures of Odysseus and his death at the hands of his son by Circe, Telegonus

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The Main Characters of the Troy Cycle

Greek Deities:

Since many older translations of Homer use Latin names for the various Greek gods, instead of the Greek names, I have included the Latin names where relevant. The characters are the same, whichever names are being used. The only Greek mortal who regularly undergoes a name change is Odysseus, who is frequently referred to by his Latin name, Ulysses.

Greek	Latin	Characteristics
Ares	Mars	god of war; lover of Aphrodite
Apollo		god of plague for infractions of ritual; angry at Greeks for insulting his priest, Chryses
Aphrodite	Venus	goddess of love; married to Hephaestus; lover of Ares
Athena	Minerva	goddess of wisdom; born from Zeus' head; Odysseus' patron
Eris		goddess of strife; threw golden apple which started quarrel between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite over which one was the most beautiful
Hephaestus	Vulcan	god of the forge; lame; spouse of Aphrodite
Hera	Juno	goddess of marriage; sister and wife of Zeus
Hermes	Mercury	messenger god, especially from gods to mortals
Polyphemus		the man-eating Cyclops who trapped Odysseus and his men in his cave; blinded by Odysseus; son of Poseidon
Poseidon	Neptune	god of the sea, earthquakes and horses; brother of Zeus; father of Cyclops Polyphemus

Thetis		a sea nymph; mother of Achilles; pleads with Zeus to let the Trojans overcome the Greek armies to placate Achilles honor
Zeus	Jove/ Jupiter	god of the sky and thunderbolts; chief deity; father of many half mortal children; final arbiter of law and order; initiator of the Trojan War

Greek Mortals:

Achilles	son of Peleus, a mortal, and Thetis, a sea nymph; greatest Greek warrior at Troy; leader of Myrmidons; quarreled with Agamemnon over Briseis, a war-prize concubine
Agamemnon	high king of Greece; king of Mycenae; led Greek armies against Troy; husband of Clytemnestra; sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia to get favorable winds to sail to Troy; killed by Clytemnestra
Calchas	Greek seer who advised Agamemnon to return Chryseis in order to stop the plague sent by Apollo
Clytemnestra	murdered her husband Agamemnon when he returned from Troy; daughter of Zeus and Leda; sister to Helen
Diomedes	brave, wise Greek warrior
Menelaus	king of Sparta; brother of Agamemnon; husband of Helen
Helen	the immediate cause of the war; wife of Menelaus; either seized by or ran away with Paris to Troy; daughter of Zeus and Leda
Nestor	king of Pylos; wise counselor
Odysseus	king of Ithaca; father of Telemachus; excellent counselor; devised Trojan Horse strategy; took ten years to return home after the war
Patroclus	Achilles' dear friend; killed by Hector who thought he was Achilles because he wore Achilles' armor
Penelope	faithful wife of Odysseus
Telemachus	son of Odysseus and Penelope

Trojans:

Aeneas	Trojan noble; not particularly important until Virgil's Aeneid
Andromache	wife of Hector, mother of Astyanax
Astyanax	young son of Andromache and Hector; killed by the Greeks to prevent his growing to up avenge Hector's death
Cassandra	a Trojan princess, cursed by Apollo to always speak the truth and never be believed; carried off by Agamemnon as a war prize; probably murdered by Clytemnestra
Chryses	priest of Apollo, whose daughter is wrongfully kept as a war-prize by Agamemnon
Hecuba	wife of Priam; queen of Troy; mother of Hector
Hector	son of Priam and Hecuba; father of Astyanax; Troy's finest hero; killed Patroclus; killed by Achilles
Laomedon	king of Troy when Hercules and Jason conquered it; father of Priam
Paris	love-obsessed son of Priam and Hecuba; judged goddesses' beauty; married Helen after bringing her to Troy; killed Achilles after the Iliad events
Priam	king of Troy when Greek armies under Agamemnon destroyed it; father of Hector and forty-nine other children; some by Hecuba, others by concubines

Troilus

Trojan prince; son of Hecuba and Priam

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The Story of the Troy Cycle

There were two Trojan Wars: 1) when Laomedon was king of Troy, and 2) when his son Priam was king of Troy. The first occurred when Jason, Hercules and the Argonauts were seeking the Golden Fleece. They stopped off at Troy for rest and refueling, but King Laomedon refused them hospitality and forced them to leave. Some versions say that Laomedon tried to cheat Hercules out of promised pay for contracted heroic deeds. After successfully completing the Golden Fleece quest, Jason and Hercules gathered an army of Greeks, returned, and destroyed Troy to punish King Laomedon. Priam, Laomedon's son, survived and rebuilt Troy.

The underlying cause of Homer's Trojan War is told in the Cypria, of which only fragments remain. The burden of too many human beings disturbed the earth and Zeus conceived of the Trojan War to lower the population and relieve the earth. He did this by allowing Eris (Strife) to attend the wedding banquet of Peleus and Thetis, where Eris stirred up conflict between the goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite over who was the most beautiful.

The three goddesses asked Paris, a rather foolish, lady-loving son of King Priam of Troy, to judge which of them was the most beautiful. Each goddess offered her own special bribe. Paris chose Aphrodite's bribe, possession of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. Helen happened to be married to King Menelaus, one of the regional Greek kings, so Paris set off to Greece with a war party, seized her (perhaps with her cooperation), and brought her back to Troy, where they were married.

Menelaus then went to his brother Agamemnon, the High King of the Greeks, and asked for help retrieving his wife from Troy. Agamemnon assembled warriors and ships from all over Greece. Divinely controlled unfavorable winds prevented the Greek fleet from sailing for Troy until Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia. The Greek army then besieged Troy for ten years.

During the ninth year of the siege, Achilles, the best of the Greek warriors, and Agamemnon quarreled bitterly over who got to keep Achilles' woman war-prize, Briseis. Feeling shamefully dishonored, Achilles withdrew his men, the Myrmidons, from the fighting, resulting in the deaths of many Greeks, including Achilles' dearest friend, Patroclus. Achilles and Agamemnon finally reconciled and Achilles reentered the battle, killing Hector, the greatest Trojan warrior, although Achilles knew that he himself would die shortly after Hector's death. The story of Achilles' wrath is told in Homer's Iliad.

In the tenth year of the siege, the Trojans were deceived by the hollow Trojan Horse (its wooden belly full of soldiers) into letting Greeks inside their walls, and Troy fell. The city was burned, many Trojans slaughtered, and the women and children taken away as slaves.

The victorious Greeks began returning home, some quickly, some less so. Helen returned to Greece and resumed her marriage with Menelaus. We meet them living comfortably together when Odysseus' son Telemachus visits their palace in the Odyssey. Agamemnon returned to his wife, Clytemnestra, who conspired with her lover, Aegisthus, to trap Agamemnon in a net and kill him. Odysseus was the last Greek warrior to return home from Troy. The Odyssey tells the story of his amazing voyage as well as his victory over the wicked suitors who were camped in his palace, devouring his supplies and intimidating his virtuous wife, Penelope.

There were also stories about Odysseus' later adventures in the Telegonia, a sequel to the Odyssey composed by Eugammon of Cyrene in the sixth century BC. The Odyssey ends with the implication that Odysseus' worst troubles are over; not so according to the Telegonia. Odysseus continues his infidelities and wanderings until Telegonus, his son by Circe, kills him.

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Homeric Poetry

Before they have writing, people transmit their history to future generations orally. Oral poetry employs a large number of "formulas," patterns that can be used over and over again to complete the rhythm of a line. This helps the poet to compose by just plugging in blocks of words instead of having to constantly recombine groups of words into poetically attractive phrases.

Homeric formulas are phrases that are used repeatedly to describe a person, place or thing. Each phrase fits into a particular metrical slot in a line of poetry. For example, here are pairs of epithets reserved for a single hero with a major role in Homer:

Multiple epithets for two Homeric Heroes

hero's name	epithet	syllables	frequency in Iliad and Odyssey
Odysseus	<i>polymetis</i> (of many devices)	4	82
	<i>polytlas</i> (much suffering)	3	38
Achilles	<i>podus okus</i> (swift of foot)	4	31
	<i>podarkes</i> (strong)	3	21

Adapted from Milman Parry, The Traditional Epithet in Homer.

In each case the first example has four syllables and the second has three, but the meanings are not much different. Some of these formulas are "fixed" and can be used wherever there is a space in the line that needs a certain rhythm; others are adapted to the particular meaning of an event. They help a poet to compose by providing ready made or easily adaptable parts for the poetic line. Such formulas could be easily remembered, even if their language became archaic.

Rhapsodes recited Homer's poetry. They were professional singers who probably accompanied themselves with simple stringed instruments. They sang for their suppers, rather like Demodocus in the Odyssey. The Homeric poems were first written down in the sixth century BC, from dictation by the Homeridae, rhapsodes who recited Homeric stories.

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The Story of the Odyssey, Briefly Retold

Books 1-4: When Odysseus sailed for Troy, he left behind his clever wife Penelope and his infant son Telemachus. A few years before Odysseus returns, a large group of suitors try to force Penelope to marry one of them by moving into her palace for an endless party devouring the food and drink belonging to Odysseus.

Shortly before Odysseus returns, Athena, disguised as Mentor, shows up on Ithaka and arranges for Telemachus to travel to the mainland seeking word of his father Odysseus. Telemachus hears that Odysseus is alive, but stuck on Kalypso's island. The suitors try to ambush and kill Telemachus as he returns to Ithaka, but Athena arranges for him to get home safely.

Books 5-8: Meanwhile, Athena has also arranged with Zeus to release Odysseus from Kalypso's island and allow him to return home. Odysseus leaves the island on a raft, which Poseidon wrecks in a storm as a final act of vengeance because Odysseus blinded his son, the cyclops Polyphemos. Nearly dead with exhaustion, Odysseus washes up on Scheria, land of the Phaiakians, and collapses in a bed of leaves to sleep. In the morning he encounters the princess Nausicaa and her girl friends who (inspired by Athena) have come to the beach to wash their linen. Nausicaa tells Odysseus the way to her parents' palace, where he is nobly hosted.

Books 9-12: While feasting at the palace, Odysseus retells the stories of the fall of Troy and his amazing adventures since he left Troy. These are stories from the ancient oral tradition of sailors' adventures to strange places, often beyond the boundaries of the real world. The following is a list of the adventures Odysseus relates while he is a guest on Scheria:

Odysseus' Amazing Adventures

Troy	The Greeks use the hollow Trojan Horse to smuggle soldiers inside the walls; they open the gates, admitting the rest of the Greek army, which quickly destroys the city.
Kikonians	A pirate raid, after which Odysseus' adventures leave the "real" world for fantasy lands.
Lotus Eaters	Perhaps on the coast of Africa; drugged bliss threatens to make sailors forget their homes.
Cyclopes' island	The cyclops Polyphemos, son of Poseidon, snacks on Odysseus' men until the survivors blind him and sneak out of his cave hidden under the bellies of sheep.
Aiolos' island	The king is in charge of the winds; he gives a bag of winds to Odysseus, which if left unopened would have allowed Odysseus to return home quickly, but against orders, his men open the bag, releasing the winds.
Laistrygones	Giants who eat people.

Circe's Isle	A witch who turns men into pigs; Hermes gives Odysseus an herb, moly, which allows him to keep his human shape; after Circe and Odysseus reconcile, she returns the men to human form, but they linger for a year as her guests.
Land of the Dead	Odysseus hears information from Tiresias about how to get home; he also encounters shades of the Greek dead and hears warnings about women's treachery
Sirens	They sing so beautifully that passing sailors shipwreck on the rocks trying to get close to them; Odysseus has his men stuff their ears with wax and tie him to the mast, so he can hear the singing and yet survive.
Skylla and Charybdis	They devour passing sailors, Skylla with her many snaky long necked hungry heads, and Charybdis as a swallowing whirlpool; Odysseus sails close to Skylla, not warning his men, and loses a few, but most are saved.
Thrinakia	The island of Helios, the sun; although Odysseus warns them not to, his starving crew eat Helios's cattle, and they and the ship are destroyed after leaving.
Ogygia	Kalypso's Isle; Odysseus is stranded here by a possessive goddess who wants to make him immortal and keep him forever; he wants to return home to Ithaka; after the gods announce their decision that he is to leave, Odysseus builds a raft and sets off, only to suffer a final shipwreck on Scheria.

The Scherians appreciate Odysseus' stories, arrange games in his honor, admire his heroic stature, give him gifts of royal treasure and take him home to Ithaka on a magically swift ship.

Books 13-24: His treasure safely concealed, Odysseus, disguised as an old beggar, hides out with the good swineherd, Eumaios, contacts his son, Telemachus, and plots the overthrow of the wicked suitors. He is so careful he doesn't even let his wife Penelope know he is home. With a little help from Athena, Odysseus and his son finally slaughter all 108 suitors, have the maids cleanse the palace hall of bodies and blood, and then hang the disloyal maids who have been sleeping with the suitors. Odysseus finally reunites with faithful Penelope. Retaliation by the suitors' families, which could lead to endless feuding, is stopped by Zeus and Athena.

The Odyssey can be read as a poet's travel guide to the imaginary Mediterranean, with plenty of examples of how one ought to treat guests. The first four books of the Odyssey are about Telemachus' visit to the mainland, where he is well fed, given gifts and well treated. This is how guests ought to be received. The suitors are slaughtered for the crime of being bad guests who eat their host's cattle, drink his wine and try to marry his wife and kill his son.

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Introduction to the *Iliad*

The *Iliad* is about an episode of destructive violent rage that occurred in the Greek camp in the ninth year of the ten year Trojan War. This rage stems from a heedless quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon over possession of war-prize women. Agamemnon is outraged and his behavior outrages Achilles. Once the rage is fully started, only many deaths can bring the cycle of violence to a close.

Homer is the reason we still know about the war at Troy. He composed two magnificent epic poems about the Trojan War, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, around the eighth century BCE. This was about five hundred years after the war itself. One reason that the Trojan War became so important to later Greeks such as Homer was that they considered the Greek victors their ancestors. Another reason was that the Trojan War, if indeed it occurred, came at the collapse of the Mycenaean Bronze Age.

Thus, its fall represented, at least in story, the last great victory of the Mycenaean Greeks before the collapse of their civilization. Homer lived in a less glorious age. Although Greeks had colonized Asia Minor after the Trojan War, they were no longer as prosperous (or as piratical) as during the Bronze Age. However, there still was a town of Troy in Homer's day, and Homer may have lived in the vicinity, earning his living by telling stories about the glorious past of the Greek conquerors, yet sympathetic to the vanquished Trojans.

Homer was said to be blind, but his vivid images and stories of Troy have survived and thrived for nearly three millennia. Homer's Troy is a mixture of some fairly accurate details of the Bronze Age, mixed with details from his own time, bound together by poetic imagination and elegant, swift-moving language. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have been so frequently praised, analyzed, translated, borrowed from, adapted and imitated that a study of Homer and his literary descendants can easily become a study of the history of Western literary culture, from Troy to the twenty-first century. People have continued to read and imitate Homer because he was a wonderful poet who told wonderful stories.

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Many Greeks are killed, Achilles sulks in his tent, eventually, Achilles' best friend Patroclus is killed, and then at last Achilles rampages, slaughtering Trojans. Even the gods get into the battle, fighting one another until Zeus declares a stop to the chaos. The poem ends rather peacefully with two funerals, one for Achilles' dear friend Patroclus and one for Hector, who killed Patroclus. Soon Achilles will die; next year Troy will fall.

Clearly, furious, short-tempered Achilles and arrogant, greedy Agamemnon are not suitable role models for later, more civilized societies, and this became a problem for future generations. Even worse, stories of the gods quarreling with one another and even engaging in wild battles became unacceptable to later generations with different, more restrained ideas of deity.

Homer's vision of the relationship of mortals to gods is chilling. To Zeus, human beings are like the poppies of the field, they bloom briefly and die. The gods are rather like spectators betting on a violent football game that gets out of hand until Zeus finally calls an end to it. But Homer's language, the power of the narrative, and Achilles' heroic character are unforgettable and have not only survived, but flourished, carrying memories of Troy into the twenty-first century.

Homer's Greeks and Trojans

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The *Iliad*

The *Iliad* can be difficult for modern readers, because it tells of an archaic, heroic, violent world whose values are strange to us and whose heroes behave badly by our standards. The *Iliad* is a violent poem about brutal men, none more brutal than Achilles. Their excellence is in their pursuit of fame and honor, in their intelligence, leadership and friendships, and in their killing skills. Their anger is passionate, brutal, at times whipped into mad frenzy by the gods. Homer describes battles in carefully anatomical, formulaic detail; the spear goes in the liver and out the nostrils, the body drops to the dust, the corpses pile up, men die over one priceless, worthless, woman, Helen, who ran off with the worthless Trojan Prince Paris.

The *Iliad* is about escalating anger and its final bitter resolution. It starts with the pointless, impious anger of Agamemnon at the priest Chryses, who tries to ransom his daughter with appropriate treasure. Next is the righteous anger of Chryses at Agamemnon for refusing to accept the ransom and return his daughter. Chryses invokes Apollo, who starts the plague, which kills the Greeks. Then there is the mutual anger of Agamemnon and Achilles as they quarrel over redistributing war-prize women, the petulant anger of Achilles as he withdraws his men from the fighting, and Achilles' murderous fury when Hector kills Patroclus. The anger eventually spreads to the elements (fire and water) and the gods, who enter the battle as eagerly violent as the human beings. Only when Zeus declares "enough," do gods and humans let go of their anger and resume an orderly, civil life.

Jinyo Kim, in *The Pity of Achilles*, argues convincingly that a major theme of the *Iliad* is how Achilles' wrath gradually and

painfully becomes transformed into pity, first for his fellow-Greeks, and finally for all human beings. She explains that a central issue in the *Iliad* is the concept of *philotes*, or the connected group of warriors, the friends. It is only this band of friends who are able to confer honor and glory on a warrior, while the group strives to take away honor and glory from their enemies. Thus, when Agamemnon takes away Achilles' honor (by taking Briseis), Agamemnon estranges himself from Achilles; they are no longer bound as friends. Since the Greeks (except for Achilles' Myrmidons) are bound to follow Agamemnon, Achilles feels little or no further allegiance towards them. This precipitates Achilles' wrath at his no-longer fellow Greeks. Jinyo explains that Achilles' wrath is finally resolved in two places: first when he sends Patroclus out to help the Greeks in Book 16, and finally when Achilles reconciles with Priam as a fellow-mortal in Book 24. ¹ Her book is especially helpful for those of us who have real trouble appreciating Achilles as a hero, because we tend to focus on his incredibly violent behavior.

Although the *Iliad* is about uncontrolled anger and its terrible consequences, the poem itself is remarkably controlled and patterned, both by its elaborate formulaic language and by the organization of its parts in relation to the whole. For example, the *Iliad* starts with refusal of ransom, plague, seizure of a war-prize woman, a quarrel and funerals in Book 1, and ends with accepting ransom, returning Hector's body, (momentary) reconciliation between Achilles and Priam, and Hector's funeral in Book 24.²

1. Jinyo Kim. *The Pity of Achilles: Oral Style and the Unity of the Iliad*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2000. 181-182.
2. Cedric H. Whitman. *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*. 1958. Rpt. New York: W. W. Norton. 1965.255, 260.

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