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Introduction to the Iliad

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Repository Citation

Cook, E. (2012). Introduction to the Iliad. In E. McCrorie (Trans.), *Iliad* (pp. xvii-lxii). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

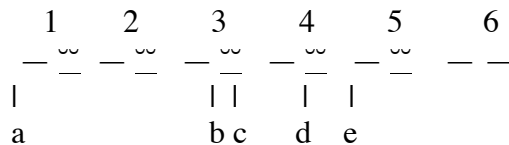
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Introduction

The *Iliad* as oral poetry

Edward McCrorie's translation of the *Iliad* is a remarkable achievement, not least for its attention to the rhythms and sounds as well as the sense of the Greek original.¹ This is especially welcome because meter is a key to understanding the poem. Unlike English meters, which are based on accent, those of Greek verse are based on the length of the syllables, while the accents are voiced independently. The verses of Greek epic are composed of six feet. Each foot begins with a long syllable, marked as —, followed by two short syllables, ~, or another long syllable. For example, the phrase “queenly Hera” is scanned in Greek as “*pōtnĩǎ Hērē*.”

In most Homeric verses, a word ends in the third foot, causing a break known as a “caesura,” which may occur after the first syllable (b), or in between two short syllables (c). A somewhat less common caesura may also occur in the fourth foot (d). Word-end at the end of a foot is called a “dairesis” and is especially common at the end of the fourth foot (e). A line of Homeric verse is schematized as follows, with numbers marking the feet and letters marking important word breaks:²



- a) verse begin
- b and c) main caesura
- d) caesura
- e) daireisis

The ancient name for this verse form is “dactylic hexameter”: the first word refers to the metrical shape — ∪ ∪ which was taken to resemble the joints of a finger. The second word indicates that the verse consists of six feet, or *metra*. Hence, ‘six-footed finger-verse.’

The “proem,” or introduction to the *Iliad*, is scanned below, with McCrorie’s translation underneath the transliterated Greek for ease of comparison:³

— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — || — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — —
Mênin áeide, theá, Peleiádeo Akhilêos
 Sing of rage, Goddess, that bane of Akhilleus,

— ∪ ∪ — — — ∪ || ∪ — — || — ∪ ∪ — —
ouloménen, hê murí’ Akhaiôis álge’ étheke,
 Peleus’ son, which caused untold pain for Akhaians,

— — — — — || — — || ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — —
pollàs d’ ipthímous psukhàs Áidi proíapsen
 sent down throngs of powerful spirits to Aides,

— — — — — ∪ || ∪ — ∪ ∪ || — ∪ ∪ — —
heróon, autoùs dè helória teûkhe kúnessin
 war-chiefs rendered the prize of dogs and every

— — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ || ∪ — || ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — —
oionoîsí te pâsi Diòs d’ eteleiéto boulé
 sort of bird. So the plan of Zeus was accomplished

— — — — — — ∪ || ∪ — — — ∪ ∪ — —
ex hoû dè tà prôta diastéten erísante
 right from the start when two men parted in anger—

— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — || — — || — || — ∪ ∪ — —
Atreídes te wánax andrôn kai díos Akhilleús
 Atreus’ son, ruler of men, and godlike Akhilleus.

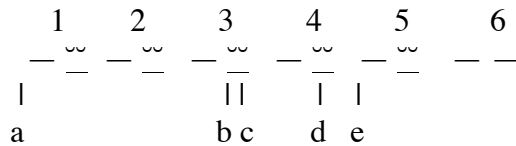
The verses of Greek epic are thus relatively long and the number of syllables is highly variable, ranging between twelve and seventeen per line. The principle by which

two short syllables and one long syllable can be interchanged, the resulting variations in the length and velocity of the line, the natural breaks within it, and the complex interplay of the independent systems of meter and accent, allow for nearly limitless variations in rhythm, tone and emphasis. Dactylic hexameter is thus an ideal medium for the dramatic and richly nuanced narrative poetry that is Homeric epic.

The rhythms of Greek heroic poetry can be understood as a formalization of the natural cadences of Greek heroic diction.⁴ This process continued over the space of many centuries, as reflected by the language, which preserves forms belonging to different periods and dialects. While the Homeric epics were composed during the archaic period (conventionally dated to 776-479 BCE) we know that Greek poets sang heroic poetry during the much earlier Bronze Age (approximately 2,000-1,200 BCE) since we can explain certain metrical problems by reconstructing the earlier forms and pronunciations. For example, the phrases *potnia Hērē* (queenly Hera) and *Dii mētīn atalantos* (equal to Zeus in intelligence) both violate the rules of meter in Homer, but would have scanned correctly in the Bronze Age. On other grounds it has been argued that poetry of the period already included ‘Homeric’ heroes such as Aias, Odusseus, and Idomeneus. The implication, then, is that hexameter poetry featuring Homeric warriors and a divine apparatus was sung in an unbroken chain from the Bronze Age to the archaic period.⁵

Phrases such as *potnia Hērē* and *Dii mētīn atalantos* belong to a much larger pattern of repeated language commonly referred to as formulas. Perhaps the best known examples of such formulas are the names and epithets of the poem’s characters. For a major character such as Akhilleus, an epithet or combination of epithets is attested for at

least one of the breaks in the verse, whatever the grammatical function of his name might be:



Noun-Epithet Formulas for Akhilleus

Subject

Position c:	\cup — — — \cup \cup — — — <i>podarkēs dios Akhilleus</i>	(swift-footed, godlike Akhilleus)
Position d:	\cup \cup — \cup \cup — — — <i>podas ōkus Akhilleus</i>	(swift-footed Akhilleus)
Position e:	— \cup \cup — — — <i>dios Akhilleus</i> <i>ōkus Akhilleus</i>	(godlike Akhilleus) (swift Akhilleus)

Direct Object

Position c:	\cup — — — \cup \cup — — — <i>Akhillēa ptoliporthon</i>	(Akhilleus, city destroyer)
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Indirect Object

Position a:	— \cup \cup — \cup \cup — — — <i>Pēleidē Akhillēi</i>	(Akhilleus, son of Peleus)
Position c:	\cup — — — \cup \cup — — — <i>Akhillēi ptoliporthō</i>	(Akhilleus, city-destroyer)

Possession

Position b:	— — \cup \cup — \cup \cup — — — <i>Pēlēiadeō Akhilēos</i>	(Akhilleus, son of Peleus)
Position c:	\cup — — — — — — — — — <i>Akhillēos theioio</i>	(godlike Akhilleus)

Several additional features of the system are worth noting. First, the phrases not only begin at natural breaks in the line, but typically complete it as well. The poet who composes using these formulas thus has a way of completing a verse with Akhilleus as the subject after reaching positions c, d, and e. As important, the poet usually has only one way of completing the verse when he reaches a given position, and none of these formulas is fully interchangeable with another.⁶

Homer's formulaic system is thus characterized by two distinctive features: economy and scope. That is to say, metrically identical formulas are avoided, and those in use tend to have a wide variety of applications: for example, "Akhilleus, city-destroyer" scans correctly as both the direct and indirect object, and is consequently used in both constructions. On the other hand, if the poet reaches position c, he can complete a line with Akhilleus as subject by saying "swift-footed, godlike Akhilleus," while if he reaches position e, he can simply omit "swift-footed" and complete the line with "godlike Akhilleus." And since "Akhilleus" and "Odusseus" have the same metrical shapes, both of them receive the epithets "godlike" and "city-destroyer". The economy and scope of the formulaic system distinguishes the Homeric epics from those of literate poets such as Vergil. On this basis, Milman Parry famously concluded that the Homeric epics were orally composed: that is, the formula is part of a *functional* system that helps the poet compose metrical narratives extemporaneously.⁷

The formulaic nature of Homeric poetry extends to larger scale narrative units such as "type-scenes."⁸ These scenes include arrivals and departures, embassies, journeys, going to bed, bathing, clothing and arming, deliberations, assemblies, oath taking, sacrifices and feasting. Walter Arend, who produced the first in-depth analysis of

the type-scenes in Homer, catalogued no less than twenty-one typical elements of Homeric sacrifices, for example. These elements are, moreover, repeated in the same order, though individual elements can be treated cursorily or eliminated entirely. Type-scenes can thus be considerably compressed or expanded depending on the context.

The variable length of the type-scene points to another important feature of Homeric poetry: the dimensions of a narrative unit generally reflect its significance. As Richard Martin has demonstrated, this is also true of character speeches: Nestor's famous long-windedness does not reflect the garrulity of old age so much as his importance as a strategic thinker. Indeed, the monumental dimensions of the *Iliad* itself directly assert its greatness as a poem. Corresponding to the poet's "expansion aesthetic," a cursory or truncated narrative can pointedly diminish an event.⁹

An especially important type-scene is the so-called *aristeia*, in which a lone warrior is described as dominating the field of battle. Its typical features include:

1. A god rouses the hero to battle
2. Brilliance of the hero or his armor in an arming scene
3. The hero appeals to his companions
4. An initial test of the hero's virtue as a fighter
5. An initial setback by wounding
6. The hero prays to a god for assistance
7. The appearance of the god who offers help and encouragement
8. The hero feels renewed vigor and achieves fresh exploits (these include a duel with an enemy leader, the leader's defeat, the victor's boast, and struggle over the corpse, which is then removed by the gods)

9. A double simile¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, this is a favorite compositional device in the *Iliad*, where it helps organize most of the major battles in the poem. The *aristeia* of Diomedes in Book 5 of the *Iliad* also shows that Homer can exploit the expectations generated by the type-scene to manipulate the audience's response.

The poet signals that he is about to begin an *aristeia* by declaring that Athene roused Diomedes to battle and describing the brilliance of his armor. We then get an initial exploit, as he kills Phegeus and captures his chariot. Other Greeks now make a series of kills: implicitly, Diomedes has broken the Trojan ranks, which is the point at which mass slaughter becomes possible. There follows an initial setback when Pandaros wounds Diomedes with an arrow. Diomedes prays to Athene, who hears his prayer and offers help and encouragement, but cautions him against fighting any of the gods except Aphrodite. Diomedes then goes on to renewed exploits, killing Pandaros and wounding Aineias. Aphrodite attempts to protect Aineias, but Diomedes wounds her, whereupon she quits the battlefield leaving her son for Apollo to defend. When the scene shifts with her to Olympos we are prepared to believe that Diomedes' *aristeia* is at an end—after all, he has just wounded an Olympian god! But the scene presently returns to the battlefield where we see Diomedes press the attack against Aineias even though he knows Apollo is protecting him: “back off,” Apollo commands, “do not hope / you can match the Gods” (5.440-1). Again we may be led to suspect that Diomedes has reached the end of his exploits: the god himself has marked the limits, one might say, of heroism itself. This seems to be confirmed when Ares takes the field: Diomedes yields as Athene instructed, and Hektor and Sarpedon lead a Trojan counterattack. But now Athene appears to

Diomedes unbidden and takes the reins as his charioteer! The two then set out after Ares, whom Diomedes succeeds in wounding. Finally, after two false conclusions, each designed to heighten the impact of the climax to Diomedes' *aristeia*, we reach that climax as "Brazen Ares / roared like nine thousand warriors fighting, / more like ten thousand joined and striving in warfare" (859-61).

The inference to be drawn is that everything about Homer is formulaic. Even the plots of the epics can be usefully viewed as 'formulaic,' since they are structured by a traditional narrative pattern, known as "Withdrawal and Return." Underlying the pattern is story of Persephone's annual disappearance and arrival, and it also informs the plot of the roughly contemporary Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. This is the sequence of themes in the *Hymn*:

- (1) the withdrawal of the hero (or heroine), which sometimes takes the form of a long absence; this element is often closely linked with a quarrel and the loss of someone beloved;
- (2) disguise during the absence or upon the return of the hero, frequently accompanied by a deceitful story;
- (3) the theme of hospitality to the wandering hero;
- (4) the recognition of the hero, or at least a fuller revelation of his identity;
- (5) disaster during or occasioned by the absence;
- (6) the reconciliation of the hero and return.¹¹

Points of contact between this pattern and the *Iliad* are concentrated on the quarrel between Akhilleus and Agamemnon, though the disaster to which the quarrel leads accounts for much of the battle narrative: Akhilleus has his mistress, Briseis, taken from

him by Agamemnon (1). As a result, Akhilleus curses Agamemnon and withdraws from battle in anger (1). The Greek army suffers heavy casualties, and an embassy is sent to Akhilleus to offer restitution (5). At first, Akhilleus refuses the offer, just as Demeter initially refuses an offer of reconciliation by Zeus. His close companion, Patroklos, impersonates Akhilleus in battle, and is killed by Hektor (1 and 2). Akhilleus and Agamemnon are then formally reconciled and Akhilleus returns to battle (6), where Akhilleus gains enhanced status by warding off destruction from the army, just as Demeter and Persephone enjoy new honors on their return to Olympos. It should be noted, however, that both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* differ from the Demeter-myth in one important respect: whereas Akhilleus withdraws to exact revenge on his community, as Demeter does in the *Hymn*, he also returns to exact revenge on the enemy, as Odusseus does in the *Odyssey*. This suggests that the theme of “Return for Revenge” represents an epic adaptation of the pattern. On the other hand, the most important point of contact between the epics and the Demeter-myth is that in each case the Return of the hero results in renewal for the community after a period of crisis in which its existence was threatened.

The Hero

Epic heroes can also be viewed as ‘formulaic’ in that they are traditional characters representing traditional character-types in traditional narratives. In the most general terms, the Greek hero interrogates the boundaries between humanity and divinity. The hero is thus defined by his superhuman strength, as measured by his conquest of monstrous adversaries or success as a warrior. As a result, the hero can serve as a vehicle

for celebrating the triumph of the life-force over the powers of death. This idea underlies heroic combat-myth generally, but it is realized still more directly in *katabasis*, the story of the hero's successful descent into and return from Hades. In Herakles' *katabasis*, this triumph is given further expression by his successful retrieval of a denizen of the underworld, the hell-hound Kerberos, and the captive but still living Theseus. So viewed, the hero's immortalization is a virtual inevitability, and deified heroes were in fact worshipped throughout the Greek world. The *Iliad*, however, denies its heroes immortality so that their deaths are tragic. This, in turn, makes the choices that Akhilleus must face meaningful.¹²

The hero's abilities are not limited to physical strength but include exceptional intelligence and capacity for deceit. The hero thus embodies a polarity between cunning intelligence (*mētis*) and violent might (*biē*) that belongs to a broad class of oppositions—e.g., mind and body, word and deed, culture and nature—used by the Greeks to organize their experience.¹³ Gregory Nagy has argued that this pairing of force and intelligence as complementary attributes of the traditional hero can be traced back to pre-Greek, or Indo-European myth.¹⁴ Yet *mētis* and *biē* are also regularly opposed in Greek thought, for example as alternative competitive strategies: whereas Akhilleus and Odusseus both embody heroic strength and cunning, when viewed together Akhilleus' failure and Odusseus' success at capturing Troy can be used to celebrate the superiority of *mētis* over *biē*. At the same time, heroic strength and cunning are equally transgressive, leaving the hero a highly ambiguous character. This combination of exceptional ability and moral ambiguity makes the hero a natural vehicle for exploring the relationship between powerful individuals and their communities.

Before turning to Homeric society, however, we need to consider a few additional aspects of the traditional hero. First, the hero often has a divine adversary and patron, and displays a marked affinity for each. Odusseus, for example, is persecuted by Poseidon for blinding the Kuklops, but is supported by Athene. Akhilleus, whose relationship with the gods is especially close, arguably has more than one patron, Athene, Hera, and above all his goddess mother, Thetis. The identity of his antagonist, Apollo, is more straightforward. In that Akhilleus and Apollo are both unshorn embodiments of youthful beauty, they resemble each other physically. While Akhilleus is the best of the Akhaians, Apollo is pointedly called the best of the gods in the context of a prophecy that he will kill Akhilleus (19.43). Apollo and Akhilleus both rout the enemy army by shouting while holding or wearing the Aegis (15.321, 18.217ff.). The similarity borders on the parodic when Apollo saves Troy by competing with “swift-footed” Akhilleus in a footrace (21.599ff.). Whereas Apollo is a god of healing as well as plague, the most lethal warrior at Troy is also said to possess special powers of healing, taught to him by the kentauros Kheiron. More important, however, is that in the *Iliad* their similarity is also thematic in that the wrath of Akhilleus issues directly from, and has analogous causes and consequences to, the prior wrath of Apollo (further below).

The hero often has a mortal companion, who can likewise be seen as reflecting the hero’s own character. In the *Iliad*, Akhilleus’ alter-ego is Patroklos, who embodies the mortal and compassionate side of Akhilleus’ semi-divine nature. Scholars have noted that the companion often dies in Withdrawal and Return narratives. In the *Iliad*, this can be elucidated by the etymology of the word *therapōn*, used to describe Patroklos. Although conventionally translated as ‘squire’ or ‘helper,’ *therapōn* was originally an

Anatolian loan-word meaning ‘ritual substitute.’¹⁵ The function of the *therapōn* is to take on the impurities of the figure for whom the substitute then dies. This, we shall see, is a key to understanding Patroklos’ role in the *Iliad*.

Finally, the hero is equally a ‘Man of Anger’ and a ‘Man of Pain,’ and in both an active and a passive sense.¹⁶ The wrath of Akhilleus thus originates in the pain he suffers when deprived of honor, and he responds by inflicting pain on his own community. In fact, pain occupies the center of Akhilleus’ thematic identity in Homer, just as his wrath is the central theme of the epic. Gregory Nagy has plausibly explained Akhilleus name as meaning one “whose **laós** [host of fighting men] has **ákhos** [grief].”¹⁷ Although his name describes Akhilleus as a source of pain, he also suffers more terribly than any other character, first the grief of losing honor and then the far greater grief of losing Patroklos, his substitute.

The hero can thus be cast as a warrior or a dragon slayer, the pain that the hero inflicts can be viewed as harmful or beneficial, and it falls equally on the enemy and on the hero’s own community. In the course of the *Iliad*, Akhilleus causes more pain to both the Greek and Trojan communities than any other fighter at Troy. Nevertheless, it is the pain Akhilleus causes *his own* community that introduces him in the poem, and thus measures his greatness. And although quintessentially a hero of physical strength (*biē*), Akhilleus does not use his strength to harm his community. Instead, he relies on a stratagem (*mētis*), in which he withdraws from battle along with his troops until the Greeks suffer humiliating defeat. His *mētis* thus serves to reveal the worth of his *biē* and is in a sense subordinate to it. But his very stratagem also figures Akhilleus as a social agent and leader of men on whom he relies in a competitive struggle with Agamemnon.

In other words, Akhilleus behaves ‘heroically’ by harming his community, but he is equally an elite warrior competing with other elites for status and prestige.

Homeric Society

The traditional hero was good to think with during the period in which the epics were taking shape.¹⁸ The date of the first written manuscripts of Homer remains controversial, though most would agree that they fall somewhere in the archaic period, between the final third of the eighth century and the first half of the sixth. For our purposes, that is close enough, since the social facts and tensions that fuel the plot of both epics would have defined Greek life throughout this time and well beyond it.

The Greeks of the archaic period were intensely aware that powerful kingdoms had blanketed the Greek mainland during the Bronze Age, roughly half a millennium earlier.¹⁹ They knew the rulers of these kingdoms as warriors and as builders of large and wealthy palaces, around whose ruins many of the later *poleis*, city-states, of Greece sprang up. Yet they seem to have been unaware that the wealth of these rulers was based on the production of textiles and scented olive oil, that the palaces were redistributive centers with elaborate bureaucracies, and that Bronze Age society was highly complex and stratified in comparison with their own.

In general, one can say that the oral traditions out of which the epics developed were relatively better at preserving information about the material culture such as tower shields and boar’s tusk helmets—although much of this could have been periodically rediscovered, by grave robbing for example—than it is about social organization or cultural values. There is in fact an important reason why epic poets would have had no

wish to preserve such information: the epics appealed to their audiences by their exotic and opulent Bronze Age settings, but even more powerfully by allowing the audience to see themselves, their struggles, concerns, values and aspirations reflected in such settings.

The notional setting of Homeric epic is thus the Bronze Age, but the social realities depicted in them are those of archaic Greece: like the Homeric gods, Homeric society has been streamlined in such a way that audiences throughout the Greek world can see their own cultural realities reflected in the poem. A leader of the Homeric community, or polis, is referred to as *basileus*, conventionally translated as ‘king,’ though the presence of multiple *basileis* on Ithake and Scherie in the *Odyssey* suggests that it only loosely corresponds to the English term. Adult male members of elite households are known as *agathos*, *esthlos*, “noble,” and *aristos*, “best,” or “chief.” These terms are vague and general, pointing to the lack of a complexly structured aristocracy. On the other hand, *aristos* also points to skill in warfare. So too, one of the terms for the political community, *laos*, also designates the army. War was a defining feature of archaic life.

Homer’s elite society was notionally egalitarian: that is, nothing formally distinguished the standing of an individual elite from that of other elites except, potentially, the vague term *basileus*. Despite, or rather because of, the lack of formal distinctions, Homeric society structures itself hierarchically through competition for “honor and relative status” (*timē*). Such status can be concretely embodied by a “prize of honor” (*geras*), awarded in return for extraordinary service. Briseis does not simply symbolize but concretely embodies the honor that Akhilleus won by sacking her city. Moreover, honor is a zero-sum system: one man’s honor is inherently at another man’s expense and both will do anything in their power to preserve it. The term for this

“competitive struggle” for status is *eris*, which can be applied to the competition between individual elites within the community, enemy combatants, and even opposing armies. Finally, there is more than one theater in which elites can compete, and more than one resulting hierarchy of *timē*. Homeric epic distinguishes between three principle theaters of competition: one could achieve *timē* as a warrior, as a counselor, and as a political leader. An important result of all this is that the status of the individual within elite society was under constant threat and negotiation, while elite identity was established by the very act of competing with other elites, and by being allowed to compete. Identity itself is largely exteriorized, a product of how one is perceived by one’s peers.

Knowledge is power in such a system: individual elites will attempt to extract as much useful information as possible from their fellow competitors, while withholding any information that others might be able to turn against them. Outright deception is a legitimate competitive strategy even with members of the same community. It follows that Homeric characters are often indirect in their words and actions, which routinely conceal hidden motives: for example, when Agamemnon encourages the entire army to return home in Book 2, he is actually testing the army’s resolve to fight (see below).

The entire adult life of an elite male was structured around winning and preserving honor, which is itself a public construct. The rules and procedures of elite competition are sometimes referred to as the “heroic code,” although they should not be divorced from the lived realities of archaic Greece. It is no exaggeration to say that competition for status was the engine that gave us Homeric epic, democracy, the Parthenon, and Plato. But elite competition was also ruthless and often brutal, and their competitive strategies not infrequently brought elite self-interest into conflict with the

needs of the community. Elites themselves could experience this same conflict as a series of competing loyalties, to themselves, to other elites, and to the community. The popularity of Homeric epic throughout the classical period, and even to the present day, derives in no small measure from its powerful dramatization of these very conflicts, for which it does not offer easy solutions. Homeric epic is commonly said to reflect elite values and though there is obviously some truth to this—the *aristeia* is at one level an ideological statement—it is important to note that in the *Iliad* Agamemnon and Akhilleus are both punished *at the level of the plot* for their implacable pursuit of self-interest at the community's expense.

Mythological Background²⁰

The cultural logic of the Homeric world is thus essentially that of archaic Greece. This world is given a Bronze Age patina with the presence of antique artifacts and practices such as chariot warfare, with the avoidance of obvious anachronisms such as iron weaponry, and above all with the heroic stature of its human characters and the open involvement of the gods in human affairs. Whereas the social world in which Homeric heroes circulate is thus broadly contemporary with the poet and his audience, the song traditions out of which the epics developed were many centuries old by the time they were finally written down. The *Iliad* consequently assumes an audience familiar with the entire Trojan War and it routinely alludes to events that lie outside its own narrative. Other events are crucial to understanding the poem although Homer does not directly mention them or even seems to suppress them, as he often does with exotic folklore

traditions. This is even true of the event ultimately responsible for the war itself, the prophecy of Themis.

Though Homer does not mention the prophecy, Laura Slatkin has demonstrated that it elucidates the central themes of the *Iliad*. From Pindar we learn that Zeus and Poseidon both “engaged in competitive strife” to marry Thetis. Themis, however, prophesied that Thetis would produce a “lord” mightier than his father. As a consequence, she advised Zeus and Poseidon to end their strife, wed Thetis to a mortal, and see her son killed in war. As Slatkin remarks: “The price of Zeus’s hegemony is Akhilleus’ death.”²¹ Although the *Iliad* nowhere relates the story, it does seem to allude to it when Akhilleus asks his mother to supplicate Zeus on his behalf “if you ever / gladdened the God’s heart with words or the right work” (1.394-5; cf. 352-4). Akhilleus continues, however, by describing how Thetis once protected Zeus when Hera, Poseidon and Athene sought to depose him. The theme of his threatened overthrow is retained, but the gods involved are significantly those who will oppose Zeus’ plan in the *Iliad* to honor Thetis’ request.

Zeus faces two other threats that can further elucidate the *Iliad*: Hesiod relates that early in his rule Zeus did battle with Typhoeus, a monster sporting a hundred serpentine heads, whom he dispatches with his thunderbolt. In other accounts, Zeus initially suffers defeat and is rescued by Hermes and Pan, while Typhoeus is identified as both a dragon and as the Orontes river.²² Such features reveal that Typhoeus belongs to a widely attested tradition in which the ruler of the gods consolidates his power by using celestial fire to defeat the forces of chaos, personified as terrestrial water and as a snake.²³ Another version occurs in the labors of Herakles, when Zeus’ son does battle with the

Hydra, a snaky monster from the swamps of Lerna whose very name means water. This tradition finds an important echo in the *Iliad* when Zeus' almost son, Akhilleus, does battle with Skamander.

Nor is the prophecy of Themis the only such warning that Zeus receives. In fact, the prophecy belongs to a broader complex of themes that takes us to the origins of the cosmos itself. Hesiod relates that after the defeat of Typhoeus, Zeus made personified intelligence, Metis, his first wife.²⁴ Like Thetis, she is a water-nymph. When she was about to give birth to Athene, Gaia and Ouranos advised Zeus to put Metis in his belly so that no one else would have his kingly honor. For after Athene, Metis was destined to produce a son who would rule the cosmos.²⁵

The law of generational succession, necessary and inevitable on earth, is an intolerable state of affairs in heaven. Both of Zeus' predecessors attempted to prevent succession, Ouranos by preventing his children from being born, that is by keeping them in Gaia's belly, Kronos by swallowing and keeping them in his own. Zeus is more successful than his predecessors because he deals with the source of the problem: the reproductive powers of goddesses connected with elemental nature. He accordingly swallows the female rather than her offspring, in the process assimilating Metis to his own being.

Zeus employs a second strategy to end generational succession in heaven by displacing it to earth. In Hesiod, this transfer is embodied in the person of Pandora, the first woman. Hesiod relates that prior to Pandora's arrival men lived free from evils, hard work and disease which brings death, but that when she opened her storage jar she released these into the world. In other words, she brings with her the necessity of

generational succession even as she herself represents the possibility of procreation. The marriage of Thetis thus belongs to this second strategy of displacement. In the *Iliad*, moreover, the Trojan War itself is closely linked to the succession theme, and in more than one way.

The key to the link is none other than “competitive strife” (*eris*). As opposed to the mortal world, where men grow old, die and are replaced by their sons, in heaven generational succession is invariably accompanied by generational strife. To displace succession to earth is to banish the strife it brings from the company of the gods. This is represented concretely by the attempted exclusion of personified Eris from a wedding, between Thetis and Peleus, meant to prevent generational strife in heaven.²⁶ Eris arrives anyway, and provokes strife among Aphrodite, Hera and Athene as to who is fairest. Zeus again displaces their strife to earth by instructing Hermes to escort the goddesses to Mt. Ida where Paris, the son of Priam, is to pass judgment. Aphrodite secures her victory by promising him the most beautiful woman on earth, Helen, who was already married to Menelaos. Strife is displaced onto humans for a third time when a contest among the goddesses over beauty devolves into the contest over a beautiful woman that is the Trojan War. The marriage of Thetis to Peleus thus directly leads to the greatest war in history and produces the greatest hero to fight in the war, Akhilleus. And the greatest poem to celebrate that war begins with strife over a woman, Briseis, between that same hero and Menelaos’ older brother, Agamemnon. Their quarrel is a displaced echo of the generational struggle that would have occurred in heaven if Akhilleus had been born the son of Zeus.

After the judgment, Paris sails with Aineias to Sparta, elopes with Helen and takes with him a considerable part of Menelaos' treasure, while Menelaos is away on Krete (3.233). When Menelaos learns of the elopement he plans the expedition against Troy with Agamemnon. The army assembles at Aulis, on the Boiotian coast. Kalkhas there prophesies that Troy will fall in the tenth year after seeing a portent in which a snake eats nine sparrows before Zeus turns it to stone. Agamemnon later shoots a deer and boasts that he surpasses Artemis in archery, whereupon the goddess raises a storm that prevents the fleet from sailing. Again Kalkhas prophesies, ordering the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter, Iphigenia, to appease the goddess' anger. The leaders send for Iphigenia under the pretext that she is to be married to Akhilleus. Traditions vary as to whether Iphigeneia is then sacrificed or Artemis snatches Iphigeneia from the altar and replaces her with a deer. This is another folktale tradition of the sort that Homer routinely avoids, though like the prophecy of Thetis he alludes to it when Agamemnon declares Kalkhas a prophet of evil and accuses him of never uttering a prophecy in his favor (1.106-8). As we shall see, his accusation is embedded in a scene that broadly parallels the sacrifice of Iphigeneia. Moreover, the audience certainly knew the story that his wife, Klutaimnestre, will murder Agamemnon on his return. If she does so because of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, then the pro-Trojan Artemis has ensured that the cost of prosecuting the Trojan war will be Agamemnon's life. When the Greeks finally land at Troy, Hektor kills Protesilaos, the first person to set foot on Trojan soil, in accordance with a prophecy. Akhilleus subsequently drives off the cattle of Aineias, captures Lukaon, a son of Priam, and sacks Lurnessos, Pedasos and many neighboring cities. In the division of the spoils, Agamemnon is awarded Khruseis and Akhilleus Briseis.

So much for the events leading up to the *Iliad*. The poem also assumes familiarity with those that follow: the epic *Aithiopsis* relates that Penthesileia and Memnon arrive at Troy after the burial of Hektor. Penthesileia is a female warrior from Thrace and the daughter of Ares. Presumably she led a contingent of Amazons. This is another folklore tradition of the sort that Homer avoids, and he nowhere mentions her (though see 3.189). Memnon is an Aithiopian prince, and son to the dawn-goddess, Eos. He arrives at Troy wearing armor made by Hephaistos. Penthesileia kills Makhaon in the course of an *aristeia*, and is killed in turn by Akhilleus. Akhilleus also kills Thersites, when the latter taunts him as being in love with Penthesileia. A quarrel breaks out in the camp over Thersites' death, and Akhilleus sails to Lesbos where he is purified of bloodshed by Odusseus.

As the fighting continues, Nestor suffers chariot-wreck when Paris strikes one of his horses with an arrow. As a consequence Nestor is almost killed by Memnon, but is rescued by his son, Antilokhos, whom Memnon kills instead. When Akhilleus attacks Memnon, Zeus weighs their souls in a scale and that of Memnon sinks. Akhilleus then slays Memnon in revenge for the loss of his friend. Eos, however, persuades Zeus to render her son immortal. Akhilleus meanwhile drives the Trojans back to Troy, but is killed at the Skaian gate from an arrow to the foot by Paris and Apollo. A battle is fought over the corpse, which is finally rescued by Aias, with Odusseus protecting his back as he retreats. Akhilleus is lamented by Thetis, her sisters, and the Muses. Thetis then snatches her son from the pyre and transports him to White Island where he too enjoys immortality. The Greeks nevertheless erect a funeral mound for Akhilleus, and hold funeral games. Odusseus and Aias quarrel over who should be awarded Akhilleus'

arms—that is, who is the best of the Akhaians now that Akhilleus has died. Odusseus wins the contest, so that intelligence is privileged over might (*mētis* over *biē*), and the humiliated Aias commits suicide. Epeios, meanwhile, concocts the plan for the Trojan Horse, which is executed by Odusseus and Athene. Troy thus falls by a stratagem, which vindicates the award of Akhilleus’ arms to Odusseus. Lokrian Aias rapes Kassandra in the temple of Athene, incurring the goddess’ wrath towards the entire army, and she scatters the fleet as it returns home.

Synoptic Analysis²⁷

The *Iliad*’s opening two scenes are of such comprehensive importance for understanding the poem that they require the listener to draw on each feature of Homeric epic that we have been considering: formulaic composition, the traditional hero, the background to the war, and, above all, the dynamics of Homeric society. In terms of formulaic composition, these scenes initiate a Withdrawal and Return, which provides a scaffolding for the narrative of Books 1—22.²⁸ On this scaffolding, Homer hangs a series of battle narratives and scenes that echo important events outside the *Iliad*’s timeline. By such means, the signal events of a ten year war are drawn into the compass of a poem whose narrated events occur in a little over a week’s time.

Turning from formulaic composition to social dynamics, we see that the theme of the poem is Akhilleus’ *mēnis*, a term normally applied to divine wrath. Kalkhas will shortly characterize Apollo as feeling *mēnis*, thereby underscoring the relationship between the characters and their anger (1.75).²⁹ Homer identifies *eris* as the source of Akhilleus’ wrath when he asks the Muse, “Which of the Gods brought these two into

conflict?" (1.8: *eris*). The "godlike anger" (*mēnis*) of Akhilleus thus results from "competitive strife" (*eris*) over "honor" (*timē*). The effect of these links is to make elite competition and its consequences for the wider community a, or even the, central issue of the poem.

The Muse now takes over the narrative, declaring that Apollo caused them to fight because Agamemnon "dishonored" the priest Khruses. The source of dishonor was Agamemnon's refusal to accept ransom for the priest's daughter, Khruseis, whom the Greeks had awarded Agamemnon as a "prize of honor."³⁰ As a result, Apollo attacks the troops, ultimately forcing Agamemnon to return Khruseis without ransom. Agamemnon's loss thus stems from a miscalculation of the priest's standing with his patron deity. This failure—or from a different angle, presumption—is in fact characteristic of Agamemnon, and, as we shall see, of Akhilleus and Hektor as well.

When Kalkhas announces that Agamemnon is responsible for the plague, Agamemnon immediately suspects that Akhilleus is attempting to undermine his status: given the facts of Greek social life, his suspicions would have been wholly natural even without the addition of some seemingly obvious cues that Akhilleus has suborned the priest. After suffering nine days of losses, Akhilleus calls an assembly in which he suggests that a prophet, priest or dream-interpreter identify the cause of the plague. The prophet Kalkhas promptly declares that he can do so, but demands protection on the grounds that he will anger a man "who is greatly / ruling all the Argives—and Argives obey him" (1.79). Akhilleus agrees to protect him, even if he should name Agamemnon. Thus encouraged, Kalkhas declares that Agamemnon is indeed responsible for the plague. Though he is wrong, Agamemnon is thus far from paranoid in suspecting

Akhilleus: whereas from Agamemnon's perspective, Akhilleus starts their "strife," from the omniscient perspective of the Muse it is Agamemnon who starts it when he misinterprets Akhilleus' motives.

When Agamemnon learns that he must return Khruseis, he becomes indignant and demands immediate restitution. Agamemnon's response is understandable in that the loss undermines his leadership position whether or not Akhilleus is responsible. His threat to take the "prize of honor" from Akhilleus, Aias or Odusseus serves as a blanket assertion of his authority at this crucial juncture, but Akhilleus rightly suspects that, as the instigator of the situation, he is the real target. He thus warns that if Agamemnon makes good on his threat he will subvert the very reason the Greeks are fighting at Troy, namely to win honor by risking their lives in battle. When Akhilleus threatens to return home as a consequence, Agamemnon tells him to flee if he wants to since "Others alongside / shall esteem me, mainly the Counselor, great Zeus" (174-5). Agamemnon's implicit calculus is that he will still have sufficient troops to conquer Troy in Akhilleus' absence. As if to confirm his assumption, the Greeks initially have the advantage until Zeus imposes defeat in Book 8. Again, however, Agamemnon misjudges his own and, more importantly, Akhilleus' standing with Zeus.

The opening scenes of the poem are formally parallel, and the wrath of Akhilleus both continues the wrath of his divine antagonist and has the same cause, object and strategy: the prophet Khruses appears before the assembled Greeks and asks Agamemnon to return his daughter in exchange for ransom; Agamemnon refuses whereupon Khruses withdraws to the seashore and prays to Apollo for revenge; Apollo kills the troops in punishment, and Akhilleus calls another assembly in which events repeat themselves.

The prophet Kalkhas declares that Agamemnon must return Khruseis without ransom and must offer Apollo a sacrifice of atonement; Agamemnon takes Briseis from Akhilleus, whereupon Akhilleus withdraws to the seashore and prays to his goddess mother for revenge; as a result many more troops die, so that Agamemnon is forced to offer to return Briseis with gifts of atonement. Whereas the *Iliad* is structured by the traditional pattern of Withdrawal and Return, the events of Books 1 through 9 have an internal model in “the Khruses-paradigm.”

Agamemnon thus compounds his initial error of refusing to return Khruseis by taking Briseis from Akhilleus. He also breaks a fundamental rule of elite competition by using his political authority to deprive Akhilleus of status (*timē*) won in battle. Akhilleus finds the prospect of losing status so intolerable that he contemplates a parallel offense, in which he would use his own superiority as a fighter to seek redress by killing Agamemnon. But just as he reaches for his sword, Athene appears to him alone and instructs him to end the fight (1.210: *eris*) and rebuke Agamemnon instead.

This scene introduces a repeated leitmotiv in which the poem nearly reaches a conclusion contrary to fate and tradition, these being essentially the same. It is also the initial registration in the poem of the traditional antinomy between “violent might” and “cunning intelligence” (*biē* and *mētis*). Whereas Akhilleus’ impulse to violence is overtly opposed by Athene’s stratagem, there is an important sense in which her stratagem is equally Akhilleus’ own. Indeed, the incongruity that no one seems to notice Akhilleus having a full-blown conversation with an invisible goddess at this critical moment would be greatly lessened if we interpret Athene’s epiphany as a particularly vivid way of saying, “Akhilleus realized that he would achieve greater satisfaction seeing Agamemnon

humiliated than killing him.” To be sure, Athene is here more than a psychological projection, but the fact remains that Homer routinely allows the audience to interpret events in both theological and naturalistic terms. Homeric scholars commonly refer to this principle as “double motivation.”

That Agamemnon commits a further, moral offense in these scenes is revealed by comparing them to the backstory of the war. Specifically, Agamemnon’s refusal to return Khruseis is analogous to Paris’ refusal to return Helen. The analogy to Briseis is closer still, since Agamemnon takes and withholds Akhilleus’ mistress. Akhilleus himself exploits the parallel when he calls Briseis his wife in Book 9 (336). Whereas the elopement of Helen with Paris will result in the destruction of Troy, the seizure of Briseis will result in the defeat of the Greek army. Agamemnon’s actions thus undermine his own moral authority in going to war.

The backstory points to a further offense. As we have seen, when Kalkhas declares Agamemnon responsible for the plague, Agamemnon alludes to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia by complaining that the prophet has never said anything to his advantage. The similarity to the present situation is obvious, and explains the allusion: whereas Artemis demands the loss of Agamemnon’s daughter for the war to begin, Artemis’ brother demands the loss of his mistress for it to continue. In both scenes, Agamemnon stands revealed by Apollo’s priest as having offended against divine prerogatives. Yet Apollo is also Akhilleus’ antagonist, and Akhilleus not only suffers on account of the god’s wrath, but he also suffers dishonor at Agamemnon’s hands analogous to that which the god suffered through his priest.

Finally, the quarrel echoes the cosmic myth in which Zeus' rule is threatened by a potential heir. Their difference in age and authority allows us to see the strife between Agamemnon and Akhilleus as an Oedipal conflict in which Akhilleus seeks to displace the mortal counterpart of Zeus as "best of the Akhaioi." The irony is that this is a contest Akhilleus would have won in heaven. And since the quarrel also echoes the rape of Helen, it unites the cosmic theme with the proximate cause of the war. As we shall see, Homer often relates his characters to multiple characters and roles within the *Iliad* itself and from other mythological traditions.

When Akhilleus withdraws, first to the shore, then to his tent, the audience assumes that disaster will result owing to the paradigmatic force of Withdrawal and Return and the internal parallel with Khryses. At first the plan of Zeus follows this scenario, though the god's expectations, like those of the audience, are deceived by the Greeks who stubbornly refuse to play along and suffer defeat: in other words, Homer uses the expectations created by the narrative pattern to celebrate Greek battle-prowess. And so, Book 2 begins with Zeus deliberating how to honor Akhilleus and kill many Greeks.³¹ His decision is to persuade Agamemnon to lead the army into battle: implicitly, Zeus assumes that the army has been so weakened and demoralized by the plague and withdrawal of Akhilleus' forces that the Trojans will defeat them without further intervention on his part. Zeus accordingly sends a dream promising Agamemnon that Troy will fall that very day. Although an act of divine intervention, Zeus' initial plan would permit a wholly naturalistic interpretation of events: his dream becomes Agamemnon's wishful fantasy.

At dawn, Agamemnon summons a council of elders in which he declares that he will test the army; and he commands the other leaders to restrain their men when he urges them to sail for home. Agamemnon understands the army's mood and attempts to employ reverse psychology to stiffen their resolve. That the other leaders will have to restrain their men is also part of his plan: he hopes to force the council to provide a public display of support for the war effort and his own leadership following on the open disaffection of Akhilleus. His plan, like the plan of Zeus, initially goes awry as the troops stampede to their ships before the leaders can respond. Odusseus, however, manages to restore order and reassemble them.

This scene typifies a common rhetorical device in which Homer uses the actions of an individual to represent those of many, since one man could not stop the flight of sixty thousand: implicitly, then, Odusseus stands for the efforts of all the Greek leaders whom Agamemnon had commanded to restrain their men. The most important example of Homer's rhetoric of representing the general with the particular is in fact the *aristeia*, in which a single character is portrayed as dominating the field of battle.

Once he reassembles the troops, Odusseus delivers the speech Agamemnon had requested in support of the war-effort. He so effectively turns the army's mood that they roar in approval. Thus, despite initially miscarrying, Agamemnon's strategy is, in the end, entirely successful: as in Book 1, Agamemnon is far from being the caricature of the bad leader that he is sometimes made out to be. He is a skilled social actor, who understands the rules, stakes and strategies, of elite competition. If he errs his are human errors and the effect achieved is realism, not burlesque.

Following the assembly is the catalogue of ships, which is notorious for its emphasis on the Boiotian forces who do not play a correspondingly significant role in the fighting. The catalogue's Boiotian focus makes immediate sense when we recall that the fleet first mustered at Aulis. This suggests that the catalogue is adapted from song traditions devoted to the early years of the war. Its incorporation into the *Iliad's* narrative thus belongs to the wider pattern of alluding to important events outside the poem's own timeline. Odusseus introduces the catalogue, as it were, in his speech rallying the troops by mentioning the prophecy of Kalkhas that Troy would fall in its tenth year.

Book 3 continues the pattern of echoing events from the beginning and end of the war, and of the poem itself threatening to end prematurely. It also contains some of the finest characterization in Homer, combined with the dark humor that is an Iliadic trademark: as the ranks are about to close, Paris comes forward wearing a leopard-skin and brandishing a bow. The leopard sports the showiest of animal skins, and the scene introduces the notoriously handsome Paris as showing off by challenging the Greeks to fight. As the smallest of the panthers, however, leopards are inferior to lions, and Menelaos on seeing Paris is compared to a lion stumbling on a deer-carcass. True to form, when he catches sight of Menelaos, the freshly demoted Paris attempts to flee like a live deer. Paris' bow likewise marks him as a second-tier fighter and also calls his bravery into question as archers are able to fight from a safe distance. On the other hand, his bow also serves to remind listeners that Paris and Apollo eventually kill Akhilleus. Both aspects of Paris' archery reecho in the scene from Book 11 in which Paris strikes Diomedes' foot: the nature of the wound foreshadows the death of Akhilleus, while the worst insult that Diomedes can think of to call Paris is "archer!"

Hektor now enters the scene and upbraids Paris for attempting to shirk the duel. He is thus introduced in terms of a contrast between his and Paris' sense of personal honor and responsibility to defend Troy. Paris accepts Hektor's rebuke, but instead of displaying shame he does so lightheartedly; his famous and cavalier dismissal, "don't scold me for lovely presents from gold Aphrodite" (3.64), reminds us of the judgment of Paris, but it also prepares us for the arrival of the goddess herself to bestow another 'gift' on her favorite. Nevertheless, Paris assents to duel Menelaos for Helen. When Hektor proposes the duel, Menelaos demands that Priam swear to its terms.

The scene now shifts inside Troy in anticipation of the heralds' arrival to summon Priam. This shift serves to introduce Helen, whom the messenger-goddess, Iris, calls to witness the duel. Iris finds Helen in her room weaving. Weaving is, ironically, a symbol of uxorial fidelity, and the irony is increased by Helen's weaving scenes from the war being fought over her. She is thus in effect weaving the *Iliad*, for which Akhilleus' singing in Book 9 and Hephaistos' forging a shield in Book 18 provide significant parallels, while Andromakhe's weaving in Book 22 is in telling contrast. When Iris delivers the news, Helen leaves at once for the Skaian gate, where she finds Priam and the Trojan elders. Priam calls her to him and asks her to identify the Greek leaders. This is another scene that has likely been adapted from traditions set in the early years of the war, though the lack of verisimilitude is perhaps not so great as is sometimes maintained: there would have presumably been few occasions on which Priam could have seen the Greek leaders without their armor, so it is not particularly surprising that he asks Helen to identify them here. More important, the catalogue of heroes, like the earlier catalogue of ships, rehearses the names and identifying characteristics of the Greek leaders *for the*

listener. Homer provides a third catalogue as Agamemnon reviews the troops in Book 4, so that the audience has repeated opportunities to get acquainted with the main characters and their Iliadic personas before the fighting begins.³²

The heralds now arrive to announce the duel. They do not directly report the speech of Hektor or Menelaos, but provide summaries. This proves important to what follows, since Agamemnon *adds* to the oath a demand for reparations. Menelaos wins the duel, but Aphrodite snatches the defeated Paris from the battlefield and deposits him in his bedroom, to which she then summons Helen. The scene thus echoes the theme of Trojan treachery with a comic version of the rape of Helen in which Aphrodite plays the role of Paris, while Paris reprises his earlier seduction, again to comic effect. This theme, and specifically Paris' treachery towards Menelaos, returns in Book 4 as another archer, Pandaros, breaks the truce by striking Menelaos with an arrow. Both offenses will be punished in Book 5, as Diomedes kills Pandaros and wounds Aphrodite in the course of his *aristeia*.

In one of the poem's many ironies, Zeus must now prevent the war from reaching a happy conclusion in which his beloved Troy would also escape destruction. By a further irony, he does so by suggesting in the opening scene of Book 4 that the gods establish peace in light of Menelaos' clear victory. When Hera objects that all her labors will be in vain Zeus yields, but demands that she yield to him in the future. Hera readily assents, declaring that she would not even oppose him if he wishes to destroy the cities she loves most: Argos, Mycene and Sparta. We are thus given the metaphysics of the fall of the Bronze Age; one can only imagine how the poem's Peloponnesian audiences must have felt on hearing this! More important for our purposes, what Zeus has done is

manipulate Hera and Athene into taking responsibility for something he finds personally repellent. He even forces Hera into making major concessions in order to do so something he is sworn to ensure happens in any event.

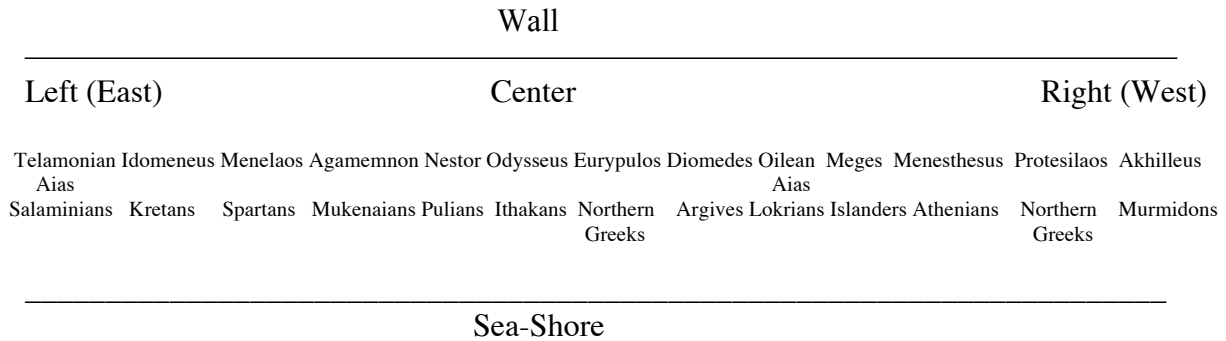
Zeus thus ‘allows’ Athene to incite the Trojans to violate their oaths: whereas the treachery of Paris against Menelaos starts the war, Athene sees to it that a further act of treachery by a Trojan archer against Menelaos will restart it. Athene thus assumes the appearance of Laodokos and suggests to the archer Pandaros that Paris would reward him if he were to shoot Menelaos. There are reasons why Pandaros would find this plausible: elsewhere we learn that Antimakhos was especially opposed to the return of Helen because he expected gifts from Paris (11.123-5). Implicitly, Paris has been using the goods acquired on his ill-fated adventures to buy off the Trojan leaders.

Pandaros proceeds to shoot Menelaos, but Athene guides the arrow so that it only does enough damage to ensure that the oath is irredeemably violated. This scene illustrates a further important aspect of double motivation: even though Athene inspires Pandaros to commit the sacrilege, this in no way relieves Pandaros of responsibility for his actions. Moreover, although he acts on his own, the Trojans bear collective responsibility for his crime, which they do not punish. Instead they begin to advance on the Greeks as Makhaon treats Menelaos’ wound.

Agamemnon now reviews the troops, beginning with Idomeneus and his men. From there he proceeds to the forces of Aias, Nestor, Odusseus and Diomedes. We are thus given a final review of the leaders before the fighting begins. Agamemnon’s review also reproduces the left half of the Greek camp, beginning with the troops immediately adjacent to Menelaos, proceeding from there to the extreme east, and then circling back.

In other words, their position on the battlefield approximates the layout of the camp.

Homer relies on a general image of the camp in his battle narratives as well as those set within it.³³



Book 4 concludes with back and forth killings by the Greeks and Trojans that indicate an evenly pitched battle. At this point, we might fairly expect the tide to turn in favor of the Trojans in accordance with Zeus’ plan. Instead, as Book 5 gets underway, Athene gives Diomedes strength and daring so that he would “garner the best praise” (5.3). When she next makes his helmet and shield blaze like the Dog Star, we know that we are entering an *aristeia* and that for the present the Greeks will be victorious. In other words, the Greeks will not be allowed to suffer defeat until they have securely established their natural superiority as fighters.

Diomedes so dominates the field of battle that the other Greeks largely recede from view. He thereby establishes himself as a surrogate Akhilleus. After Diomedes wounds Ares at the climax of his *aristeia*, the battle is again evenly fought until Aias breaks the Trojan ranks at the beginning of Book 6 and another series of killings follows. The most memorable scene of the latter series occurs when Menelaos captures Adrestos, who begs Menelaos to spare his life in exchange for ransom. Menelaos is about to do so when Agamemnon races up and counsels him not to spare even the child in his mother’s

womb. Homer declares that he counsels “rightly” (6.62), yet it is clear that the Greeks had accepted ransom previously. Something has changed between then and the poem’s own timeline, and although Agamemnon can be imagined as still seething after the Trojans broke the truce, Troy’s fall is also imminent. Ransom has become irrelevant, even counterproductive.

The prophet Helenos now urges Hektor to return to Troy and ask Hekabe to sacrifice to Athene. This is the pragmatic goal of Hektor’s mission, and it says something important about Homeric theology that it would make sense for the Trojans’ best fighter to quit the field at such a moment to propitiate the goddess. The thematic and dramatic purpose of the mission, however, is to arrange a meeting between Hektor and his wife and son with Troy’s doom seemingly imminent. To the pathos this lends their encounter, Homer adds the irony of having Andromache give the tactical advice, to withdraw the army within the city’s walls, that might have saved Troy. Hektor replies that to do so is not in his nature, since he always fights in the front ranks, seeking glory for himself and his father. Hektor’s embrace of the heroic code and single-minded pursuit of honor thus leads not only to his own death, but the destruction of an entire civilization.

The return of Hektor and Paris to the fighting in Book 7 is followed by a string of Trojan successes. A counterattack, doubtless led by Diomedes, seems inevitable. Athene does, in fact, arrive from Olympos to aid the Greeks, but she is met by Apollo, who proposes that they end the fighting for that day by rousing Hektor to challenge the Greeks to a duel. At first, however, none of the Greeks rises to face Hektor, and they must be shamed by Nestor into doing so. After thus dramatizing that Hektor is a formidable opponent, Homer proceeds to show that a number of Greek fighters are a match for him,

as eight men rise to the challenge. When they cast lots to determine who will face Hektor, the army's prayer that Telamonian Aias, Diomedes or Agamemnon be chosen provides a further ranking of the Greek fighters. The symmetry with the duel between Paris and Menelaos would be exact had Agamemnon been chosen, but arguably for that same reason he cannot be, and it would seem incongruous, following on Diomedes' *aristeia*, if Hektor survived a duel with him. Aias, however, is different, since his special ability is as a defensive fighter; he thus fights Hektor to a draw though Homer still makes it clear that Aias wins the fight. The first day of fighting is thus framed by a pair of duels in which the brothers Paris and Hektor are each defeated but nevertheless survive.

As Book 8 begins, Zeus' initial plan has failed spectacularly.³⁴ He now summons the gods to assembly and forbids them from interfering in the battle. After the armies fight indecisively through the morning, Zeus weighs the fates of the Trojans and Greeks in a scale. When the fate of the Greeks sinks, Zeus thunders, sending a panic on the Greek army. The effect is deliberately arbitrary and the narrative of Greek defeat is brief, thus twice diminishing Trojan success: elsewhere, for example, reversals in battle are caused by the wounding or killing of a hero. In the present case, not only is no one killed initially, but Hektor also fails to kill a single fighter in his advance to the ships. He is thus denied a proper *aristeia*.

Nestor is unable to join in the retreat because Paris shot one of his horses with an arrow. When Hektor makes for him, Diomedes comes to the rescue. This is another scene that echoes events outside the poem: in this case the chariot-wreck from the *Aithiopsis* that results in the deaths of Antilokhos, Memnon and ultimately Akhilleus. The parallel is announced by the scene in which Zeus weighs the fates of the armies, which echoes the

one in which he weighs the souls of Memnon and Akhilleus (he will later also weigh the souls of Akhilleus and Hektor). Diomedes then places Nestor on board his own chariot and presses the attack until Zeus hurls another thunderbolt. Nestor recognizes the warning and turns the chariot in retreat despite Diomedes' protest that he will feel a "fearsome pang" (8.147: *akhos*) when he hears Hektor boasting. Indeed, at this very moment Akhilleus is acquiring his identity as a hero who causes "grief" (*akhos*) to his people. Akhilleus' surrogate, Diomedes, serves as the personification of Greek *akhos*, which is further compounded by Hektor's excited gloating as he delivers a victor's boast that he has not earned. The scene thereby also serves to expose Hektor's emotional lability and overconfidence following on his success—his first in the war—that will prove to be his undoing.

Zeus returns to Olympos for a second assembly, in which he promises the further rout of the Greek forces until Akhilleus reenters battle to avenge the death of Patroklos. Zeus' announcement illustrates Homer's avoidance of narrative suspense so that the listener can focus on the how and why of what is happening. In the present case, an important—and characteristic—result of doing so is to cast the events of Book 9 in a deeply ironic light. The book opens with an assembly in which Agamemnon reprises his speech urging the army to sail home—only now he speaks in earnest. On this occasion, however, Diomedes stands up to deliver a spirited defense of the war effort. As in Book 2, the army shouts in approval. Nestor recognizes that Agamemnon can now be persuaded to reconcile with Akhilleus and requests a private meeting of the leaders that will spare Agamemnon's dignity when he makes the proposal. Agamemnon agrees to

restore Briseis and offer “ransom” (*apoina*) if Akhilleus will return to battle. A delegation of those closest to Akhilleus is then sent to persuade him to accept.

Agamemnon’s offer continues the Khruses-paradigm in which he earlier restored Khruseis to Khruses and provided a sacrifice of atonement that corresponds to his offer of ransom here. But the offer Agamemnon makes is also designed to subordinate Akhilleus to him as, among other things, his son-in-law. As important, Agamemnon makes the wrong offer: *apoina* is in all other cases offered to the victorious enemy to secure the return of a soldier taken live in battle. Agamemnon thus figures Akhilleus in the role of the enemy, from whom he is ransoming his own captive army. Odusseus, who is sensitive to the insult, changes “ransom” to “gifts” when he repeats Agamemnon’s offer to Akhilleus. Agamemnon concludes his offer by making his objective explicit: “Let him bend . . . / let him submit to me now since I am more kingly” (9.158-160). Odusseus omits that too, and replaces it with something he hopes will be more persuasive, declaring that whatever Akhilleus might think of Agamemnon and his gifts, the army will honor Akhilleus “like a god”; he may even be able to kill Hektor, who thinks that none of the Greeks are his equal. Akhilleus, however, sees the offer for what it is, replying “For I find a man hateful as Aides’ / gate who hides one thing in his mind while saying another” (9.312-3). After an impassioned speech rejecting the offer, Akhilleus declares that he will sail for home at dawn.

It is widely recognized that Akhilleus’ famous choice between a short life in which he wins great fame and a long life without it is a hyperbolic version of the heroic code itself. Rehearsing that choice here reveals a further problem that Akhilleus faces: what Agamemnon has done, in effect, is not only to break the contract in which honor compensates for risking one’s life in battle, but also to sever the link between honor and

fame. It is precisely this link that Agamemnon's offer fails to restore to Akhilleus' satisfaction, and it is only then that Akhilleus decides that fame is not worth dying for. In other words, Homer has the protagonist of his own epic declare that the *Iliad* is not worth dying for!

Phoinix now relates his own autobiography and the story of Meleager in order to persuade Akhilleus to return to battle. The moral of the Meleager myth is that if Akhilleus delays his return to battle then Agamemnon may renege on the gifts. In combination, however, his stories make three further points: do not quarrel with the 'father,' the 'mother' is the real problem, and above all listen to your friends. To make the last point he manipulates a folktale pattern known as the "Ascending Scale of Affections" as various people approach Meleager and attempt to persuade him to return to the fighting. Whereas the traditional sequence is friends, mother, father, siblings, spouse, Phoinix deliberately locates friends immediately below spouse in order to stress the claims of friendship on Akhilleus' loyalty.³⁵ Akhilleus softens his position in response, declaring that he'll think matters over; when Aias rebukes him for treating his own *friends* this way Akhilleus replies that he will return to battle when Hektor sets fire to the fleet. Friendship is thus made to trump social obligation, revenge to trump material compensation: Akhilleus will return to battle due to bonds of friendship, but not before obtaining satisfaction from Agamemnon in the form of a humiliation so complete as to compensate satisfactorily for his own humiliation and to render laughable any message conveyed by Agamemnon's "gifts." When Odusseus returns to the Greek assembly, however, he does not mention that Akhilleus will return when the Trojans set fire to the ships, and instead repeats Akhilleus' initial threat to sail for home. The reason for this, of course, is that if he had, then the army would have torched the fleet themselves!

With his response to Aias, Akhilleus signals that he will now abandon the “Khruses-paradigm,” according to which he should now accept the girl and the ransoms, and follow the “Meleager-paradigm,” returning to battle at the very last minute. He thus draws precisely the opposite moral from the story to that which Phoinix wanted him to draw. But Akhilleus also takes to heart the warning that if he reenters battle and saves the day, then Agamemnon will have no reason to make good on his offer. There is, however, an added danger of following the Meleager-paradigm that is lost on Akhilleus: Meleager is convinced to return to battle by his wife, Kleo-patre, whose name simply reverses the elements of Akhilleus’ own *therapōn*, Patro-klos.

Book 10 is based on another folk-tradition to which the *Iliad* does not explicitly refer, an oracle that if the newly arrived Thracian king Rhesos and his horses drank from the Skamander Troy would be invincible.³⁶ Homer replaces the oracle by giving Rhesos an exceptional team of horses and golden weaponry. The horses may serve to remind the listener of the prophecy, but the practical effect is to make Rhesos an inviting target rather than threat. More important is the episode’s purpose: following their defeat in battle and the failure of the embassy to reconcile with Akhilleus, Greek morale is at a low point. This is concretely represented in the anxious concern of the army’s leader, Agamemnon, in the book’s opening scene. The night-raid that follows provides a welcome change of tone and a minor Greek victory. But it also sets their further defeat in the books that follow in still higher relief.

Book 10 also elaborates a theme introduced by Akhilleus in Book 9.423, when he ironically declares that the Greek leaders should contrive a better “plan” (*mētis*) than the present one. Nestor’s plans to build the Akhaian wall and to send an embassy to

Akhilleus are each referred to as a *mētis*, and both are meant to ensure the army's safety. In the former case, the plan consists of literally replacing Akhilleus with a defensive wall, while in the latter it consists of enlisting Akhilleus' offensive might.³⁷ Akhilleus' suggestion echoes the traditional dispute over the relative merits of might versus intelligence and implies that Nestor's *mētis* has proven inferior to Akhilleus' *biē*. As if following up on the suggestion, Agamemnon now seeks Nestor's further *mētis* (10.19). When Nestor proposes a night-raid, Akhilleus' surrogate, Diomedes, volunteers. The proposal is thus a successful analogue to the embassy in Book 9 that failed to secure Akhilleus' *biē* on behalf of the army. Yet Diomedes also asks Odusseus to accompany him, and the raid is a success because Diomedes and Odusseus use their *biē* and *mētis* in tandem. In this sense, the night-raid models an ideal that is sundered by the quarrel between Akhilleus and Agamemnon.

The third day of battle begins with Book 11 and will continue through Book 18. It has three phases, each beginning with Greek success, followed by a sudden reversal. In fact, the majority of the narrative describes the Greeks as winning: it is something of a triumph of construction that Homer is able to craft a seven book narrative of Greek defeat that so little credits Trojan success. Book 11, in turn, is organized by a series of failed *aristeiai* involving the best Greek fighters after Akhilleus. As leader of the army, Agamemnon is given the first *aristeia*, and his contains the only arming scene until Patroklos enters battle: his wounding and withdrawal are thus emblematic. One of the striking features of Agamemnon's *aristeia* is that his victims are not described as adults, but typically as pairs of sons from leading Trojan families, some of whom he kills in an especially brutal manner. In addition to being easier prey than a Hektor or Aineias, they

would also provide exceptional spoils to the notoriously acquisitive Agamemnon. One of the youths, however, is able to strike him on the elbow before Agamemnon kills him. Agamemnon continues fighting for a time, but once the wound dries the pain sets in and he is forced to withdraw. Homer memorably compares Agamemnon's pain to that of a woman giving birth, after he has killed numerous products of such labor (note the echo of the Adrestos-episode). Tellingly, Agamemnon does not pray to a god after suffering his initial setback, nor does a god intervene as a result, and his *aristeia* is cut short with dire consequences for the Greek army.

When Agamemnon withdraws, Hektor presses the attack and Odusseus appeals to Diomedes for help. Diomedes strikes Hektor on the helmet, so that "night-like darkness covered his two eyes" (11.356), imagery that also describes death: Diomedes thus exacts revenge on Hektor's boasting in Book 8 by virtually killing him. At this point, we can hear the orchestra tuning up for Diomedes' victory-march, but then Paris abruptly strikes him in the foot with an arrow. A foreshadowing of Hektor's death is thus balanced by a foreshadowing of Akhilleus' with his surrogate serving as both killer and victim.

When Diomedes returns to camp, Odusseus is soon wounded and must be rescued by Aias. Paris then wounds Makhaon, whom Nestor escorts back to camp on his chariot. Akhilleus sees Nestor enter the camp and sends Patroklos to investigate. As always, Nestor thinks strategically and his response includes another stratagem designed to further the Greek cause: he knows that Akhilleus' vulnerability consists precisely of his affection for Patroklos and that the ever compassionate Patroklos is concerned for his fellow Greeks. His words are thus calculated to increase Patroklos' alarm at the situation and indignation over Akhilleus' continued intransigence. Patroklos readily accepts the

further suggestion that he rescue the situation by impersonating Akhilleus in battle. As he returns to Akhilleus' hut, however, Patroklos encounters Eurupulos, who asks him to treat his wounds. Ironically, his very compassion takes Patroklos out of action for an extended period, thereby prolonging the Greeks' agony.

As Book 12 opens, Homer returns to the Greeks and Trojans fighting *en masse* with the remark that the Greek wall had been built against the will of the gods. As a consequence, Poseidon and Apollo would destroy it after the war. The story serves to underscore the importance of the wall in this segment of fighting. It does so, however, in a way that calls attention to the impermanence of human achievements, for which, implicitly, epic provides the antidote. The irony is deepened by the simile that follows in which Hektor is compared to a boar or lion whose courage kills him (12.46; cf. 16.753). Andromakhe's own worst fear is used to introduce Hektor's *aristeia*, so that his greatest exploits are achieved in the shadow of his impending death. Dead Hektor thus triumphs beneath an obliterated wall: not only human accomplishment but humanity itself is ephemeral, and heroes are the most ephemeral creatures of all. Yet their very mortality renders them immortal as the subjects of epic song.

After a protracted struggle at the wall, Hektor finally hurls a rock at the gates and breaks them open. Book 12 closes with him leaping inside, followed by many Trojans. This is a scene to which we will repeatedly return. But just as Hektor seems to be on the verge of setting fire to the ships, the Greeks stage a major counterattack that ties up an important thread of the story: the revolt of the gods against the plan of Zeus that began in Book 8. The revolt now continues when Zeus averts his attention from the fighting. Poseidon notices him do so and journeys to Troy, where he inspires the two Aiantes and

the other Greek leaders. When Pouludamas warns Hektor that the Trojans are in disarray, Hektor instructs him to reorder the center while he reinforces the left. When Hektor nears the ship of Protesilaos, he and Aias exchange insults. This, the first Greek ship to land at Troy and thus one of the furthest up the beach, is also the one Hektor eventually sets fire to. As the book closes we again seem to be at the moment of truth.

Book 14 opens with Nestor was “not overlooking the war-cries, though he was drinking.” This would seem to follow on the close of Book 13, but the situation in which we find Nestor is where last we saw him in Book 11. He has, it would seem, been drinking for 1,350 verses! Moreover, when Nestor leaves his hut to reconnoiter, what he confronts is not the evenly fought battle of Book 13, but the Greek rout of Book 12. We thus have three contradictory narrative signals: what we find is Nestor at the close of Book 11, what Nestor *hears* seems to continue the narrative of Book 13, but what he *sees* returns us to the situation at the close of Book 12. Each of these issues can be explained with the poet’s habit of narrating simultaneous events consecutively: that is to say, the events of Books 13 and 14 both follow on those of Book 12, and the close of Book 13 is designed to mask the shift.³⁸ Often, the poet’s motive for narrating events in this way is simple clarity. In the present case, however, he exploits the convention for sensational effect as it allows him to dramatize the climactic scene of Trojan assault on the wall multiple times. Nestor’s apparent drinking binge can be explained by another feature of the convention: when Homer switches between narratives, the thread that drops out of focus can become, in effect, frozen in time. Another example of this is the duel between Aias and Hektor, which occurs over 400 verses after they first challenge each other in Book 13, and nearly 900 verses after Hektor first breaches the wall.

Once the convention is understood, points in which the narratives intersect become obvious, and even amusing. After Nestor hears the “war-cries” he tells Makhaon to keep drinking while Hekamede prepares a bath to wash away the gore from his body. This continues situation we last saw them in at the close of Book 11. When he leaves the hut at the beginning of Book 14, Nestor confronts the situation at the end of Book 12. Homer then reintroduces Poseidon with the same verse used to announce the god’s earlier intervention in Book 13: “Hardly blind at his watch, the well-known / Earth Shaker” (14.135=13.10). On this occasion, what the god noticed is not explained, nor is his arrival at Troy described, because the scenes belong to the same timeline. After encouraging Agamemnon, as he had earlier encouraged the Aiantes, Poseidon shouts with the voice of 10,000 men and places strength in the Akhaians.

Homer now explains why Zeus averted his attention, and even more strikingly why he does not hear Poseidon’s shout: Hera tricks him into having sex! This is the culmination of the revolt of the gods against the policy of non-interference that Zeus announces in Book 8. Logically, Hera’s seduction is what makes Poseidon’s assistance possible in Books 13 and 14. Dramatically, however, it is the climax of the narrative of Greek counterattack. Therefore the seduction comes after the events it facilitates: narrative logic is subordinated to dramatic emphasis.

Hera begins by bathing and dressing in a humorous echo of the arming scene that introduces an *aristeia*.³⁹ She then tricks Aphrodite, a goddess naturally associated with lovers’ deceptions, into providing her with a love charm, and enlists the aid of embodied sleep, Hypnos, to use his powers on Zeus after she has sex with him (in another scene that can be interpreted both theologically and naturalistically). As she approaches, Zeus

becomes aroused and promptly launches into a catalogue of former lovers, declaring that he never felt such desire for any of them as he feels for Hera at this moment. As if to punish her deception, Hera must listen to his catalogue without betraying a hint of annoyance.

Zeus transforms the summit of Mount Ida into a Golden Age paradise enclosed by an impenetrable mist so they can make love in private. When Zeus falls asleep afterwards, Hypnos informs Poseidon, who again shouts encouragement, this time at a logically appropriate moment. As the goddess of marriage, Hera performs her divine and conjugal role in order to help the Greeks in battle, thus uniting the antinomy between love and war that we find in the similarly comical and risqué song of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* Book 8. (Less direct parallels can be found in the paired woundings of Ares and Aphrodite in *Iliad* Books 5 and 21.) Their lovemaking also ironically evokes *hieros gamos*, or “sacred marriage,” which is meant to ensure the fertility of the earth. Here it ensures Greek success in their counterattack, the highpoint of which is the long-delayed duel between Aias and Hektor. Hektor strikes but fails to wound Aias, whereupon Aias strikes Hektor on the chest with a rock. Once again, the language surrounding Hektor is elsewhere applied to dying warriors, so that Diomedes and Aias both take revenge for Hektor’s earlier insults by killing him symbolically.

Zeus awakens at the beginning of Book 15 to see the Trojans routed, correctly surmises that Hera is responsible, and threatens to beat her. Hera is duly frightened and swears that she did not put Poseidon up to harming the Trojans. Zeus smiles at the obvious prevarication and reduces the punishment to that of summoning Iris and Apollo so they can undo her interference. When Iris next persuades Poseidon to retire from the

fighting, the revolt in heaven is finally at an end. Apollo appears to Hektor, promises to rout the Greeks for him and breaths “great strength” into Hektor himself (15.262).

Although Apollo is pro-Trojan, it is possible to detect a sinister aspect to his inspiration, for the newly invigorated Hektor is immediately compared to a horse that breaks his halter and runs off exalting across the plain (263-8). He has thus come untethered: this same simile is applied to the notoriously flighty Paris at the close of Book 6.

As Hektor advances into battle, Apollo goes before him bearing the Aegis. After enough delay to reveal that the Greeks could hold their own even under these circumstances, Apollo shakes the Aegis and shouts. As in Book 8, the Greek reversal is stunningly swift and arbitrary, the result of god-sent panic. Once again the Trojans rush across the wall “with a great shout” (384). Like Nestor in Book 14, Patroklos hears the shout and leaves the hut of Eurupulos to investigate; like Nestor what Patroklos sees is the scene at the end of Book 12.

As Patroklos hastens to Akhilleus, the Greeks put up a desperate resistance and the Trojans are at first unable to break through to the ships. Exchanges of killing follow to show that the battle is evenly pitched despite Apollo’s intervention. The sinister undercurrent of the horse simile now returns as Hektor rages like Ares or a forest-fire and foams at the mouth while his eyes blaze beneath his bristling brows (605-8). Finally, Hektor rushes at the ship of Protesilaos, while “with a surpassingly great hand / Zeus pushed [him] from behind, and roused the army beside him” (694-5). Nowhere else in Homer is Zeus described as physically present on earth. The effect is so striking, in fact, that scholars have sought to emend the text. To do so is to miss the point: Zeus’ push

belongs to the same rhetorical strategy that occasioned Apollo's promise to rout the Greeks rather than to help Hektor do so.

Having killed Protesilaos at the beginning of the war, Hektor now sets fire to his ship, an act that ultimately leads to his own death and Troy's destruction. Book 16 opens with Patroklos arriving at Akhilleus' hut. Akhilleus sees his excitement and takes an ironic tone, comparing Patroklos to a little girl running to her mother (7ff.). This is precisely the role he rejected in Book 9, when he compared himself to a mother bird protecting the Greek army (323ff.). In another of the poem's many ironies, the comparison rebounds on Akhilleus' own head, for he will fail to protect Patroklos from harm.

As we have seen, there remains the danger that if Akhilleus returns to battle at once, Agamemnon might not make good on his offer of goods. By sending Patroklos into battle Akhilleus hopes to buy time so Agamemnon can make a formal presentation of the gifts. Akhilleus thus gives Patroklos three instructions: beat back the Trojans so that you can win great honor and glory for *me* from the Greeks; once you do return and do not fight without me or you will make *me* less honorable; nor press the attack to Troy, for Apollo may enter the fighting (80-96). In other words, 'don't be too successful or I may end up like Meleager and you may end up dead.' Akhilleus concludes his instructions with an arresting image:

Now I pray fatherly Zeus, Athene, Apollo:

let no Trojan escape from doom, let them all die—

A natural enough wish for a Greek, perhaps, but he continues with:

yes, and each Greek! and *we* two might take off death,

so that we alone may loosen the veils of Troy (16.97-100).

The metaphor here belongs to a central theme of the poem: Akhilleus wishes both to shed his mortality as if it were clothing and to undress Troy. To remove a woman's veil is synonymous with having sex, while the word Akhilleus uses for 'veil' can also mean 'battlement,' so his words simultaneously refer to throwing down the city's walls and raping its women. The precondition to doing so is to be 'stripped' of his mortality. This arresting image is then inverted by the scene of Hektor's death: responding to the cries of the townsfolk, Andromakhe races to the city-wall, and at the sight of Hektor being dragged behind Akhilleus' chariot she casts the veil from her head. In so doing, she symbolically casts down the battlements of Troy and surrenders to the sexual violation that her husband's death makes inevitable.⁴⁰

Patroklos' next act is to "put on" the armor of Akhilleus. Up to this point Patroklos has 'known his place' and remained in it: his first words in the poem are "Why did you call, Akhilleus? How do you need me?" (11.605). But, once he puts on Akhilleus' armor, Patroklos forgets himself, pressing the attack to the walls of Troy itself. To do so is not only contrary to Akhilleus' explicit instructions, it is also a crime against his closest friend, the severity of which can scarcely be overstated. Had he succeeded, Patroklos would have deprived Akhilleus of both his honor and his fame, a fate even worse than Meleager's who received fame but no honor.

We can relate Patroklos' behavior to his status as Akhilleus' *therapōn*. What we see here is the nature of the impurity he acquires and the vehicle of its transfer, the former suggested by, and the latter consisting of, Akhilleus' divine armor. Once encased in that armor, Patroklos loses all sense of personal limitations and begins behaving like a god.

Moreover, he implicitly engages in “competitive strife” (*eris*) with Akhilleus by attempting to storm Troy himself. To make his identification with Akhilleus complete, Patroklos dies at the hands of Akhilleus’ divine antagonist and killer, Apollo.

Patroklos’ name is significant in this context, which refers to ‘ancestral fame.’⁴¹ As Akhilleus’ ritual substitute, ‘ancestral fame’ is an essential component of Akhilleus’ own identity. Patroklos is thus on one level the embodied ‘fame’ of Akhilleus. Akhilleus loses his ‘honor’ and withdraws from battle in which men win ‘honor’ and ‘fame.’ Akhilleus then sends his own ‘ancestral fame’ into battle, so that he can regain his honor. In so doing, he loses his ‘Patro-klos,’ who dies at Apollo’s hands. But, in the world of the *Iliad*, one purchases immortal fame with one’s life. And it is precisely because Akhilleus loses ‘Patroklos’ that he reenters battle and wins Patroklos as the avenger of his Patroklos.

The arming scene announces the beginning of an *aristeia*. That the armor does not glow foreshadows Patoklos’ death.⁴² Patroklos’ *aristeia* culminates in his killing a son of Zeus, Sarpedon. Sarpedon throws his spear and kills the mortal trace-horse, Pedasos, thus foreshadowing Patroklos’ own death. Automedon cuts loose the trace horse, as Nestor was attempting to do when Diomedes rescued him in the parallel scene from Book 8. Sarpedon makes another cast at Patroklos and misses, whereupon Patroklos strikes him in the chest, killing him (his desire to mistreat the corpse foreshadows Akhilleus’ mistreatment of Hektor’s corpse and Hektor’s own desire to mistreat Patroklos’). Shortly after Patroklos kills Sarpedon, he reaches the walls of Troy itself, where he is repulsed by Apollo. The god commands Patroklos to yield, which he does, but despite Akhilleus’ warnings he continues to press the attack. Apollo then knocks Patroklos dizzy, Euphorbos

strikes him in the back and slinks off, and finally Hektor strikes him in the belly. A point of this unique description of a soldier's death is that, once again, Homer gives Hektor no glory. When the dying Patroklos then prophesies Hektor's own death, Hektor replies:

Patroklos, why for me do you prophesy steep death?

Who knows if Akhilleus, the son of fair-haired Thetis,
struck by my spear first, won't surrender his spirit? (859-61)

His words here could not be more different to his pessimistic speech to Andromache in Book 6. From a theological perspective, the notion that he could defeat Akhilleus reveals that he is suffering from heaven-sent blindness (*atē*).

The death of Patroklos foreshadows the deaths of both Hektor in the *Iliad* and Akhilleus in the *Aithiopsis*: Sarpedon kills a trace-horse, just as Paris twice kills Nestor's horse (in *Iliad* Book 8 and the *Aithiopsis*); Patroklos kills Sarpedon, the son of a god, just as Akhilleus kills Memnon, the son of a goddess; Apollo helps Hektor kill Patroklos, just as he helps Paris kill Akhilleus; Hektor kills Patroklos, just as Memnon kills Antilokhos; Akhilleus kills Hektor in revenge, just as he kills Memnon in revenge. There follows an entire book devoted to the fight over Patroklos' body, which echoes the fight over Akhilleus' body in the *Aithiopsis*; in both cases Aias eventually recovers the corpse for the burial that follows.

The strategic aim of Book 17 is to provide a convincing scenario by which Hektor acquires Akhilleus' armor while the Greeks recover Patroklos' corpse. The battle is thus fought indecisively, as reflected in Zeus' own uniquely shifting favor. This has a number of important consequences: because he lacks armor, Akhilleus is at first unable to avenge Patroklos' death. A protracted battle over the corpse consequently ensues that lends

weight to the situation. When Hektor dons Akhilleus' armor, we see the hybris of his claim to be Akhilleus' equal translated into culpable action. Homer underlines this by having Zeus object to his presumption and deny Hektor the further glory of capturing Akhilleus' immortal horses. Nevertheless, Zeus fits the armor to Hektor's smaller dimensions, as he places "immense strength" in his hands (17.206), whereupon personified battle-rage, Ares, "puts him on, / filling the body inside him/ hugely with strength and prowess" (210-12). The loss of Akhilleus' armor also makes possible the magnificent scene in which Hephaistos forges a replacement. Finally, because the Greeks retrieve the body, the Trojans are unable to force Akhilleus to return Hektor for burial. This, in turn, makes the events of Books 24 possible.

When Hektor strips the armor, Menelaos sends Antilokhos to seek help from Akhilleus. Thus, in the opening scene of Book 18, "swift-footed" Antilokhos arrives with the news that Patroklos is dead. Antilokhos' speech is brief, a mere four lines, but could not be more momentous. Akhilleus responds not with speech but terrible wailing, joined by the maidservants who shriek and beat their breasts while Antilokhos sobs and lamentation. *This* is grief beyond speech. As with Hektor, Homer describes the prostrate Akhilleus with formulaic language elsewhere applied to men dying. His 'abuse' of the formula is especially fitting because mourning is a sympathetic death experience: from this point forward until Book 24, Akhilleus all but ceases to have bodily functions. But the image of Akhilleus, the essence of physical perfection, rolling in ashes and dust, also echoes the dichotomy in his semi-divine nature. This is followed by a further contrast, in which personified nature joins in the lament. A mist now forms on the surface of the deep from which Thetis and her nymphs emerge, to surround and envelop, to mourn with and

for, Akhilleus. The scene of his death thus shades off into that of his funeral without a comma. But it is not enough to say that the scene foreshadows Akhilleus' death and funeral, for in a very real sense Akhilleus' mortal self dies together with his substitute.

In Book 1, Akhilleus prayed to his mother, who emerged from the sea to find him mourning the loss of a loved one. Akhilleus then asked her for a certain favor:

“this is Akhilleus' prayer translated into reality,” and the parallel in setting brings the fact home with brutal clarity.⁴³ Now, finally, we get speech, as Thetis asks Akhilleus why he laments, since Zeus has fulfilled his every request. It is important to remember that Thetis as a goddess must know Patroklos has died (cf. 1.365). The scene dramatizes, in addition to much else, the inability of divinity to comprehend human suffering, even when that human is the god's own offspring, and even when the god will shortly suffer the very same loss.

For a second time Thetis sets off for Olympos to extract a favor, this time consisting of armor from Hephaistos. Meanwhile, Athene clothes Akhilleus in the Aegis and circles his head in a golden cloud from which fire blazes. So attired, Akhilleus stands by the ditch and shouts, striking terror in the Trojans and thrice routing the army. The scene thus unites three thematically charged images. The first is that of clothing as identity. Akhilleus has lost his armor, but Athene gives him another article of divine clothing capable of changing the nature of its occupant, thereby allowing a mortal to perform miracles. This clothing, moreover, is the Aegis, so that the divinity with whom Akhilleus is particularly aligned is Zeus. Second, Akhilleus is associated with celestial fire, and once again by extension with Zeus.⁴⁴ Finally, Akhilleus protects Patroklos' body by emitting pure, inarticulate sound, as he had when he learned of Patroklos' death: his

cry of grief now becomes a cry of rage, a cry capable of murder. Paradoxically, at the moment he gives himself completely to death, Akhilleus becomes most fully aligned with divinity, and specifically with his almost father, Zeus. Events have been set in motion of such magnitude that the fabric of reality itself is beginning to rip. This is marked by a virtual divine epiphany of Akhilleus as ‘father Zeus,’ wielding the Aegis and thunderbolt. The result of the epiphany is that Akhilleus prevents the Trojans from desecrating the body of Patroklos, just as Zeus prevents the Greeks from seizing the body of Sarpedon. Patroklos’ corpse is meanwhile returned to camp, and, by another miracle of nature, Hera forces the sun to set. With Hera’s act three interrelated narrative threads come to an end: Zeus’ promise to Thetis in Book 1 to bring about Greek defeat, his prohibition against the gods’ assisting the Greeks and Trojans announced in Book 8, and his promise in Book 11 that Hektor would be victorious for the space of this day.

The assimilation of Akhilleus to Zeus prepares for the following scene in which Hephaistos forges Akhilleus’ armor. The centerpiece of his creation is the shield, depicting the universe as a series of balanced oppositions and life as a cycle, with images of procreation (marriage, plowing a field), death (murder, war), and life from death (hunting, sacrifice, harvesting). At the center of the shield are the heavens, giving us an Olympian perspective on the universe. But enclosing the shield are contrasting images of civilized life. A city at peace is characterized by contrasting scenes of erotic union (a marriage), and of division (a dispute in court over how to compensate for a life taken). Marriage, of course, echoes the dispute that caused the war and that informs the plot of the poem itself, while the courtroom scene points to the one solution to those disputes that no one in the poem ever considers.⁴⁵ The city at peace is in turn balanced by a city at

war whose attackers are divided into factions: those who would accept ransom and spare the city, and those who simply want to destroy it. Again the parallel to Troy is direct.

It is widely recognized that, at one level, the shield symbolizes the *Iliad* itself as an immortal work of art. The poem is thus presented as a larger whole, of which the Trojan war is only a small part. Yet the armor also represents the character and destiny of Akhilleus: as divine armor, it represents his own divine nature; as a symbol of the *Iliad* it represents the immortality he achieves as the hero of epic. And when Akhilleus picks up the shield, he's got the whole world in his hands. Akhilleus thus wields a symbol of his destiny had Thetis married Zeus. When Akhilleus dons this armor, he will do battle with personified nature, the Skamandros, in a scene that echoes traditions in which the sky-god consolidates his rule by battling terrestrial water.

When Thetis returns to the camp at the beginning of Book 19, the mere sight of the armor scares the daylight out of the army. Once again, the Greek amazes by the juxtapositions it achieves: "but Akhilleus, as he looked at the armor, so did bilious anger put him on even more, and terribly did his eyes shine forth from beneath his brows, as though flame" (19.15-17). Thetis then instructs Akhilleus to "put on your might" (19.36). And finally, as he prepares to fight, "his two eyes blaze as though flame of fire, and unendurable grief began putting on Akhilleus' heart as, raging at the Trojans, he put on the gifts of the god" (19.365-8). Anger and grief wear Akhilleus like a suit of immortal armor. This is the perfect inverse to his earlier wish to 'take off' death, and yet it allows him to fulfill that very wish, for Akhilleus' godlike rage leads to his immortalization in epic.

Just as we expect Akhilleus to race off to war, he calls an assembly to renounce the quarrel with Agamemnon. Agamemnon there delivers a lengthy self-exculpatory speech in which avoids addressing Akhilleus by name, referring to him once as the son of Peleus and several times simply as “you.” He concludes with: “Since I was blinded, Zeus removing my good sense, / I’m inclined to make amends with a boundless payback (*apoina*)” (137-8). In a calculated insult he again uses the offensive term, *apoina*, that Odusseus had earlier replaced with “gifts.” In pointed contrast to Agamemnon, Akhilleus gives Agamemnon a full line honorific address. Nevertheless his words too are barbed: “lavish gifts if you like, whatever is proper, / or retain them: that’s your choice” (147-9). The goods are merely gifts and meaningless now, just as honor is meaningless, for Akhilleus is no longer a member of the human community. His call to battle further underscores the point, while conveying a sense of his own urgency.

Odusseus, however, insists that Agamemnon present the gifts and offer a feast of atonement, so that Akhilleus “will lack nothing that is due” (180). The gifts are not simply for Akhilleus’ sake: the social contract must be reaffirmed. At this point, an exasperated Akhilleus becomes the mouthpiece of the audience’s own impatience: “Ah but now they lie savaged, those whom Hektor, / son of Priam, killed when Zeus granted him kudos. / You two rouse us to eat though!!” (203-5). Nevertheless, he acquiesces, the ceremonies are performed, and, finally, Akhilleus arms for battle. The humanization of Akhilleus’ horses that began in Book 17 as they weep for Patroklos now reaches its striking conclusion. When Akhilleus rebukes them for failing to bring Patroklos back safely, Xanthos declares that they were not to blame but the “best of the Gods” killed him

(413), and it is Akhilleus' fate as well to be killed by a god and a mortal. With this further portent, the *aristeia* of Akhilleus begins.

Just as Akhilleus enters the battle, however, the scene switches to a divine assembly as Book 20 opens that will conclude with the gods departing for war. The human and divine-assembly scenes are formally and thematically parallel: now that the quarrel with Agamemnon is resolved, Akhilleus returns to the fighting; now that the revolt of the gods against Zeus has ended, Zeus formally annuls his policy of non-interference and invites them to join in. (compare the divine and human assemblies in Books 1 and 8-9.) Zeus' stated motive in doing so is to prevent Akhilleus from sacking Troy prematurely. Implicitly, Akhilleus has the power to overturn fate itself, just as Zeus describes himself as able to spare the life of Sarpedon contrary to fate (and will again in Hektor's case). Moreover, Akhilleus is able to sack Troy single-handedly: the only other hero who could and in fact did so is Zeus' son, Herakles. Akhilleus so dominates the fighting, in fact, that the other Greeks vanish from view for the duration of his *aristeia*: it is as if he is fighting his own private war, which in a sense he is.⁴⁶

The scene of the gods setting out for battle is majestic, even portentous, but will grow increasingly light-hearted and even funny as it progresses. This is typical of Olympian subplots, such as Hera's seduction of Zeus, as is the resulting contrast with the human fighting. Five gods set out to support the Greeks and six the Trojans: tellingly, even outnumbered the pro-Greek gods are more powerful. Personified Eris now rouses both sides as Athene and Ares shout, Zeus thunders, Poseidon shakes the earth, and Hades cries out in alarm lest his dank realm be exposed to view. Not only are the forces that rule the universe joining in the battle, but they threaten to confound the cosmic order.

In this way Homer dramatizes not merely the significance of this moment, or even Akhilleus, but humanity itself.

When Akhilleus enters the battle, the sight of him “glowing in armor” (20.46) terrifies the Trojans. The gods now set about keeping Akhilleus in check, with the stated aim of preventing Troy’s fall, but with the poetic aim of delaying the duel with Hektor so that Akhilleus’ *aristeia* will have the narrative dimensions appropriate to its significance. Apollo intercedes first by rousing Aineias to fight Akhilleus. Aineias is the only remaining fighter on the Trojan side who is of Akhilleus’ stature, so if the poet’s strategy were simply to delay the encounter with Hektor, then it would be natural to have them duel. But the scene is not simply functional: formally, Akhilleus’ *aristeia* begins and ends with his dueling members of the Trojan royal house, Aineias and Hektor. This can be paralleled with the first day of fighting, where duels with Paris and Hektor bracket the *aristeia* of Akhilleus’ surrogate, Diomedes. More significant, however, is that Aineias is a Trojan counterpart to Akhilleus himself. Homer thus introduces them as they come together to fight as “two men, easily the best men” (158: *aristoi*). Both are, moreover, sons of goddesses, a point to which Aineias calls attention in issuing his challenge. The most telling connection between them, however, is that Aineias feels *mēnis* towards Priam because the latter did not honor him (13.460-1: *epemēnie*), so that in either case the cause of the hero’s wrath is the king’s failure to honor “the best” of his warriors **with the further result that Aineias withdraws from fighting. And whereas the death of Patroklos draws Akhilleus back into the fighting, Deiphobos persuades Aineias to return to battle so that he could protect the corpse of his brother-in-law Alkathoos.** The result of these parallels is that Akhilleus begins his *aristeia* by virtually killing

himself. But at the moment Akhilleus is about to take his life, Poseidon whisks Aineias off to the edge of the battle and instructs him to avoid further engaging Akhilleus.

As Book 21 begins, Akhilleus splits the Trojan ranks, driving half onto the plain, and penning the other half by the Skamander. Homer compares them as they flee to locusts burned by fire, thus maintaining the fire imagery that surrounds Akhilleus. The centerpiece of the sequence is the encounter with Lukaon, a son of Priam whom Akhilleus had earlier captured and sold on Lemnos. Lukaon attempts to supplicate Akhilleus, but on this occasion Akhilleus does not spare him. The contrast in Akhilleus' behavior shows us that something has changed between then and now, so that his response becomes that of Agamemnon in the Adrestos-episode. But while Agamemnon's earlier advice is "fitting" because Troy is about to fall, Akhilleus is here unsparing because he is about to die. He thus addresses Lukaon as "friend" before killing him. By so awakening his listeners to the tragedy of the human condition, Homer prepares them to respond with sympathy to Hektor's death. Such emotions would have been impossible in Book 15, where his death would have been heroic, while in Book 19 killing him would have been a simple act of revenge. Now his death remains both things, but it is also *tragic*.⁴⁷

After dispatching Lukaon, Akhilleus resumes his killing spree. This enrages Skamander because his streams are now full of corpses. After warning Akhilleus to desist, the river rushes at him in flood. Akhilleus retreats to the plain but the river continues to pursue him. There follows the battle with the river: an episode that corresponds to the hero's setback in an *aristeia* thus assimilates Akhilleus to the sky-god during a crisis in which the cosmos itself is threatened. We are now also in a position to

see that the episode is also the climax of a series of themes that assimilate Akhilleus to Zeus. Yet Akhilleus himself threatens the cosmos by transgressing the limits of mere humanity; for this reason his return to battle is accompanied by portents.

As in the cosmogonic myth, Akhilleus is initially overwhelmed by the river, but receives divine help and his opponent is overcome by celestial fire. Hephaistos now burns Skamander and does not relent until the river makes the crucial promise that he will not prevent Troy from burning. With this, the fight between the gods, or *theomachy*, finally gets underway: what began as somber and portentous now quickly devolves into comedy bordering on slapstick. It serves an analogous function to Book 10 by lightening the mood between the deaths of Lukaon and Hektor.

Apollo now inspires Agenor to face Akhilleus; when Akhilleus gives pursuit, the god takes on Agenor's appearance and deludes Akhilleus into thinking that he can catch him. Apollo thus buys time for the Trojans to retreat to Troy. In the opening scene of Book 22, Apollo then taunts Akhilleus by revealing his identity. The entire *Iliad* is here encapsulated in a single image: Akhilleus' tragedy issues from a naked will to power that is the very essence of his nature. At the most general level, his struggles define the human condition. Akhilleus' anger can also be extended to his own frustrated attempts to identify with his divine self, represented concretely in his reliance on his mother, his struggles with 'the father,' and his vain, unknowing pursuit of his own divine *doppelgänger* in the present scene. At this level, his emotions likewise represent the anger and sorrow of everyman, as does his choice between a short life with immortal fame or a long life as nobody. So viewed, a central message of the *Iliad* is that we all

purchase whatever immortality we are capable of achieving with sacrifice, the greatest immortality with the ultimate sacrifice.

Akhilleus had looked at all the possible compensations for his own mortality and rejected them, declaring that material goods cannot compensate, social status cannot compensate, immortal fame cannot compensate for his life, that is, a human life. Yet that same man decides revenge is worth dying for. This begs the question, Whose death is being avenged? That of Patroklos? Yet Patroklos is his own ritual substitute. Akhilleus' heroism is an act of revenge, but what he avenges is his own mortality and he avenges it with ancestral fame.

All this leads to a further question. The *aristeia* of Akhilleus ends as it must with Hektor's death. But why must Hektor die? Priam opened the gates of Troy to receive the Trojans. Now he cries out to his son to enter Troy, but Hektor refuses because he feels shame before the Trojans and fears their rebukes. In short, honor and shame destroy Hektor. Once again, the heroic code is portrayed not simply as completely egocentric but as posing a threat to civilization itself. And yet, as Akhilleus races towards him, his armor "like the flaring / light from a fire, the Sun-God's blaze when he rises" (22.134-5), Hektor turns coward and runs. The effect of the armor on the Greeks and Trojans helps prepare for his response here, though Akhilleus is physically so imposing that his response does not surprise in any case. To appreciate Homer's artistry at this moment, imagine the episode if Hektor had taken his stand: despite his earlier puffery, Hektor is no match for Akhilleus, as he is now made to recognize. Homer's response to the artistic challenge of making their encounter climactic is thus to explore a new set of emotions, terror and helplessness in the face of—literally—approaching death. As a consequence

Akhilleus becomes more than death's agent, he virtually becomes the death-god himself.⁴⁸

Akhilleus chases Hektor around the city three times. Akhilleus and the Myrmidons will soon process three times around the pyre of Patroklos, enclosing the space and making it sacred (23.13; cf. 24.15-6). Their race thus becomes a funeral procession for the city of Troy itself. Athene then impersonates Hektor's brother, Deiphobos, and deceives Hektor into believing that he will help him face Akhilleus. She causes Hektor's death, but in an important sense she helps him as well: the one thing Hektor lives for, that he has sacrificed himself, his family and all of Troy for, his honor, he has just thrown away by fleeing Akhilleus. And yet, Athene, his mortal enemy, restores him to honor by tricking him into behaving like a man. All that the Trojans and Greeks see is that he stops running, takes his stand, and dies a noble death. We, the audience, know he is tricked into doing so, but unlike the poem's internal characters we also hear his inner thoughts in which he declares his resolve to go out in a blaze of glory.

Hektor dies near the Skaian gate, the scene of his earlier departure from Andromakhe. Her worst fear is now realized as his courage kills him. Akhilleus deals Hektor a blow to the throat while he is wearing Akhilleus' own armor: it would be hard to imagine a more direct or potent way of saying that to kill Hektor is to kill himself. When Hektor then prophesies that death, Akhilleus replies, in chilling, nihilistic contrast to Hektor's taunt over the dying Patroklos:

Lie there, dead. I'll accept my portion whenever

Zeus and the other Gods are willing to send it (365-66).⁴⁹

His *aristeia* concludes uniquely with Akhilleus gaining control of his victim's corpse, which the gods pointedly do not intervene to protect.

Book 23 is devoted to the funeral and funeral games of Patroklos with their attendant contrasts between grief and joy, death and affirming life. The scene of mourning Hektor's death at Troy with which the previous book closes is now balanced by Akhilleus and the Myrmidons mourning Patroklos, supine on his bier with Hektor prostrate in the dust beneath him. After providing a funeral meal, Akhilleus withdraws to the shore of the "loudly / roaring sea" where "Sleep overtook him" (59-62). Once more the sea, his mother's element, gives concrete expression to his feelings of anger and grief. Next morning, Akhilleus loads the pyre with offerings to accompany Patroklos in the afterlife. But the fire will not kindle. Akhilleus then prays to the North and West winds, and Iris serves as his messenger, thus performing a role for Akhilleus that she elsewhere performs for Zeus. As Akhilleus pours libations, shrill winds rise up from the sea and then hurtle down onto the pyre, which explodes in flame. Akhilleus again enlists the support of elemental nature, the howling winds that again express his anger and grief, as does the raging fire that consumes the corpse of his own mortal self.

Many an Akhilleus-epic no doubt ended with Akhilleus on the pyre and the funeral games in his honor that followed. Such scenes would provide obvious closure and emphasize the ritual dimension of the narrative. In the *Iliad*, we do get the hero's death and funeral games, though not of Akhilleus himself, but of his substitute, Patroklos, and no cult is founded. But the poem pointedly does not end here: this is not the resolution that this epic demands, that Akhilleus needs

Next day, Akhilleus hosts funeral games honoring Patroklos, in which Akhilleus is himself reintegrated into the human community. We are thus given a glimpse of the ‘real’ Akhilleus, an Akhilleus without the rage or sorrow, an Akhilleus in charge of the situation, master of his own self, generous to a fault, conciliatory in the face of strife, and respectful of others’ prerogatives. The funeral games are, paradoxically, the closest the poem’s human characters ever get to the carefree existence of the gods. As such, they are the mortal counterpart to the *theomachy*. Whereas Book 22 dramatized Akhilleus’ unbridled rage, Book 23 prepares both Akhilleus and the listener for the ransom of Hektor. Homer thus employs an episode that traditionally might conclude an epic in order to soften Akhilleus’ character, so that a more meaningful conclusion becomes possible. But the games serve the further purpose of bidding farewell to the other Greek heroes after they have been excluded from the narrative for nearly three books. As such they are also a framing device, echoing the catalogues of Books 2 to 4 that introduced them.

The first event, the chariot-race, is also the most important and is consequently narrated at greatest length. Diomedes wins the event thanks to Athene’s support even though Eumelos had the better team: as the events progress the link between divine favor and human success emerges as a prominent theme of the games. Tellingly, the prize of honor won by our surrogate Akhilleus is a woman. The more interesting contest, however, is for second place, which Antilokhos wins by using a trick to cut off Menelaos, who had the better team of horses. This reproduces the contrast between force and intelligence that is a pervasive theme of the poem. What makes this example especially noteworthy is the parallel between Antilokhos and Patroklos: as we have seen, the death of Patroklos foreshadows the death of Antilokhos, who also comes to replace Patroklos in

Akhilleus' affections in extra-Homeric tradition. In the present scene, Akhilleus smiles at Antilokhos' impetuosity, his only smile in the poem. The brother of Agamemnon thus quarrels with a substitute-Akhilleus over honor, but the quarrel quickly reaches the peaceful resolution that so eluded their betters.

When Menelaos complains that Antilokhos cheated, Antilokhos readily cedes his prize. He does not, however, cease competing, and he wins the prize in the ensuing verbal contest, just as he had won the contest for second place: "Back off now," he pleads, "for I'm much younger than you are" (587). After following with platitudes about how the youth lack discernment and intelligence he concludes by demonstrating that he has plenty of both: "The horse that *I won* here / I will *give* you myself. If you ask for a greater / prize from *my house*, I'll grant it gladly . . ." (591-4). Menelaos accepts his excuse and declares he will *give* Antilokhos the mare, even though it *belongs* to him.

The poem concludes by posing once more the issue of compensation. In Book 9, Akhilleus declares that mere goods cannot compensate for lost honor, nor can fame compensate for his life, unless he first avenges Agamemnon's insult. This he achieves, but at the cost of losing someone he loves far more deeply than Briseis. Again he seeks revenge and again it doesn't work, but here the failure is more profound. Akhilleus has killed Hektor and buried Patroklos with honor, but finds no closure. To his own unpleasant surprise, Akhilleus discovers that revenge is wholly inadequate in redressing grief over loss. In the end, revenge is exposed as simply another form of material compensation.

The funeral of Patroklos has restored Akhilleus to the human community, but Book 24 opens with a return to his former isolation, as he lies sleepless in his hut,

wanders distraught along the seashore, and each dawn he ties Hektor to his chariot and drags him three times around Patroklos' funeral mound. He won't relinquish Hektor's body or stop mistreating it because to do so, to release it, would be to accept Hektor's death, and thus Patroklos' death and with it his own. Then Zeus sends Priam to secure his son's release in an account modeled on *katabasis*, the hero's descent into the underworld.⁵⁰ This is the quintessential heroic exploit, celebrating the triumph of the life force over the forces of death, so it is tragically ironic that what Priam retrieves is a mere corpse.

And so, on his way to the camp Priam meets Hermes, the god who escorts the souls of the dead to Hades, at a river, symbol of the spiritual divide between this world and the next. From there, Hermes escorts Priam into hostile terrain under cover of darkness. Suddenly Akhilleus' hut has become monumental, with a gate barred by a timber-beam that takes heroic strength to remove. Priam then miraculously appears before the killing machine in control of his son's lifeless body. Once again, Akhilleus has become the god of death.

Priam is the key to the emotional resolution of this poem. In Priam, Akhilleus can see his own grieving father. It is the knowledge of that grief that allows him to accept the compensation for a human life that he repeatedly found inadequate. For his part, Priam enters the death-realm to ransom his son's corpse, but he restores Akhilleus to life in the process. They mourn together over the loss that defines us as human, Priam for his son, Akhilleus for his father, even as they adopt each other as father and son.⁵¹ Afterwards, they eat together, and sleep in the same hut, Akhilleus, for the first time in the poem, with Briseis. What Akhilleus has done, and has insisted on doing, is create the formal

relationship of *xenia*, or guest-friendship, with Priam that transforms a scene of ransom into one of gift-exchange. He thus addresses Priam as “friend,” even as he accepts him as a suppliant and adopts him as a father. Accepting Priam’s ‘gifts’ amounts to accepting his own mortality, and yet paradoxically that very acceptance means saying yes to life for the brief span that is allotted to him. Once again, I suggest, this is Homer’s view of the destiny of every man, if we have the strength to shoulder it.

Yet the narrative stubbornly refuses to close: once again we return to scenes of family. Our last image in the poem is not of the Greeks but Hektor’s family mourning over his corpse. The last speech in the poem is not by Akhilleus, but Helen, lamenting the death of Hektor, her brother-in-law, followed by Priam’s instructions to the Trojans to gather wood for the funeral. The *Iliad* concludes with an open door onto a tragic future that helps grant the events of the poem their larger significance. As a result of Hektor’s death Troy will soon fall, Akhilleus and Priam will be killed by each other’s sons, Andromakhe enslaved, Helen restored to her husband, and Astuanax hurled from the walls of the city. The funeral of Hektor is thus the funeral of Troy itself.

¹ I employ McCrorie's spellings of the Greek names and generally cite his translations except for a few places where it was necessary to treat some significant wordplay in the original. The best general introductions to the *Iliad* are by S. Schein (1984) and M. Edwards (1987) who traverse much the same terrain covered here in greater detail. More advanced students will also want to consult I. Morris and B. Powell eds. (1996).

² There is another important word break at the end of the first foot, or after the first syllable of the second, so that the verse naturally divides into four word groups. This does not, however, affect the formulas that I am using to illustrate Homer's compositional techniques.

³ Greek accents are based on pitch rather than stress as in English verse: a ´ or 'acute' accent indicates a rising tone, a ` or 'grave' indicates a lower or falling tone, and a ^ or 'circumflex' indicates a rising and falling tone.

⁴ The first three sections are especially indebted to G. Nagy (1999); on the issue of continuity see also M.P. Nilsson (1932) esp. 187-220; M. L. West (1988 and 1992).

⁵ We can take this much further: Nagy in particular (e.g. 1999) has traced many prominent themes in Homer back to the much earlier "Indo-European" period, long before the arrival of the first Greek speakers in Greece.

⁶ The epithets *dios* (godlike) and *ōkus* (swift) both follow position e, but they can cause the preceding word to scan differently.

⁷ See esp. A. Parry (1971) and A. Lord (2000).

⁸ W. Arend; see also M. Edwards (1992) 284-330.

⁹ R. Martin (1989); "expansion aesthetic" is his term; see also Edwards (1987).

¹⁰ For *aristeiai* cf. Schein (1984) 80-2; Edwards (1987) 79-81.

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- ¹¹ M. L. Lord (1994) 181-2; see also E. Cook (2012).
- ¹² On the ‘mortal hero’ see esp. S. Schein (1984).
- ¹³ G. Nagy (1999) esp. 45-9; E. Cook (1995) esp. 29-32, 149-52.
- ¹⁴ G. Nagy (1990) 13-17.
- ¹⁵ Nagy (1999) esp. 33, 292-5.
- ¹⁶ Adapted from E. Cook (2009). On Homeric society, see, e.g., E. Beidelman (1989), K. Raaflaub (1996), and I. Morris (1996).
- ¹⁷ Nagy (1999) 69-93. It matters little whether this is a scientific or folk-etymology, only that the audience understood his name this way; on which see Nagy (2004) 131-7.
- ¹⁸ Adapted from E. Cook (2004).
- ¹⁹ See, e.g., J. Bennet (1996); and for a general introduction to Bronze Age Greece see C. Shelmerdine ed. (2008).
- ²⁰ On the complex relationship between poet, audience and the tradition, see esp. R. Scodel (2003) and A. Ford (1992).
- ²¹ L. Slatkin (1991) 101.
- ²² Strabo 16.2.7; Apollodorus Lib. 1.6.
- ²³ M. L. West (1997) esp. 300-4.
- ²⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony* 886ff.
- ²⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony* 897.
- ²⁶ The *Cypria* relates that Thetis did not accept Zeus’ advances and Zeus in revenge forced her to marry a mortal: This version is, however, incompatible with the *Iliad*’s narrative, which requires that Zeus be in her debt. On the relationship of Homer to the epic-cycle see especially J. Burgess (2001).

²⁷ For a more in depth synoptic study, see E.T. Owen (1947). M. Edwards (1987), in an updating of Owen, canvases what he deems to be the most important books: 1, 3, 6, 9, 13, 14, 16, 18, 22 and 24. Advanced students should consult B. Fenik's (1968) analysis of repeated patterns in the battle narratives of books: 5, 8 11, 13, 16, and 17.

²⁸ For its deployment in the *Odyssey*, see E. Cook (2012).

²⁹ On *mēnis*, see L. Muellner (1996).

³⁰ On compensation, see D. Wilson (2002).

³¹ See E. Cook (2003).

³² Scodel (2003), e.g., 39-40, is especially insightful on the need for multiple introductions, summaries and foreshadowings, which she accounts for with variability in audience knowledge, attention and competence.

³³ After M. Willcock (1976) 116-17.

³⁴ See E. Cook (2009).

³⁵ See Schein (1984) 112-3. Hektor's journey into Troy in Book 6 follows the traditional pattern. On the character of Phoinix, see Scodel (2003) 167-72.

³⁶ On Book 10, see C. Dué and M. Ebbott, edd. (2010).

³⁷ See Nagy (1999) 45-9.

³⁸ See, e.g., R. Scodel (2008).

³⁹ Edwards (1987) 248.

⁴⁰ Schein (1984) 9, 176.

⁴¹ Nagy (1999) esp. 102-3, 111-15.

⁴² Homer does, however, describe Patroklos and Automedon in their "glittering armor" as they first strike terror in the Trojans (16.279).

⁴³ Owen (1947) 178.

⁴⁴ On fire symbolism in Homer, see Whitman (1958) ch. 7 and on symbolism generally see ch. 6.

⁴⁵ Though compare 9.632-3.

⁴⁶ Akhilleus does address the army at once point (20.354-63), but even there they remain nameless and faceless.

⁴⁷ On the tragedy of Hektor, see esp. J. Redfield (1994).

⁴⁸ Anticipated at 20.481; cf. 21.39.

⁴⁹ Compare his earlier response to the prophecy of Xanthos, 19.420-3.

⁵⁰ See C. Whitman (1958) 217-8.

⁵¹ Schein (1984) 159.

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Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Jonathan Burgess, Thomas Jenkins, Edward McCrorie, Corinne Pache, Seth Schein and Norman Williamson for reading and generously commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. Please credit them with anything you find of interest; responsibility for errors of fact and interpretation remain my own.

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