

Muses. Lecture 2: Homer's *Iliad*

A) Gods and men

- anthropomorphism of gods (including low “human” behaviour”); also grandeur
- 1) “Homer made his men like gods and his gods like men.” (Longinus)
- 2) “And he threw down the Achaians’ wall with utter ease, as when a little boy knocks over sand-castles on the sea-shore - he builds them to play with in his childish way, and then amuses himself by flattening them again with hands and feet. So you, lord Apollo, smashed all the work the Argives had laboured at with much pain, and started a panic among them” (*Il.* 15.361-6; tr. Hammond)
- 3) “The wilful and the moral, the trivial and the awesome are deeply intermixed” (Taplin 1992)
- interdependence and interaction (sacrifices; children; favourites; concern for mortals)
- 4) “I do care for them [mortals] even as they die” (Zeus, *Il.* 20.21; tr. Hammond)
- distance between gods and men: gods set apart; spectators; gulf of immortality
- 5) “This will be a grievous business, and beyond endurance, if you two are to quarrel in this way over mortal men, and set the gods to wrangling: and we shall have no pleasure in the excellent feast, since unworthy things will be foremost.” (Hephaestus on Hera-Zeus quarrel, *Il.* 1.573-6)
- 6) “Think, son of Tydeus, and shrink back! Never think yourself gods’ equal - since there can be no likeness ever between the make of immortal gods and of men who walk on the ground.” (Apollo warning Diomedes, *Il.* 5.440-2)
- 7) “This is the fate the gods have spun for poor mortal men, that we should live in misery, but they themselves have no sorrows” (Achilles to Priam, *Il.* 24.525-5)
- 8) “Now when Zeus had brought Hektor and the Trojans through to the ships, he left the men to endure hardship and misery beside them in relentless battle, and he turned his shining eyes away, looking far out over the land of the horse-herding Thracians...” (*Il.* 13.1-4)
- Contrasts between mortals and immortals: events (e.g. quarrel of Achilles/Agamemnon v quarrel of Hera /Zeus; seduction and sex in Helen/Paris scene and Hera/Zeus scene); suffering
- 9) “with both her hands she wiped away the ichor from her daughter’s hand: the hand was healed, and the heavy pains soothed away” (*Il.* 5.416-7, Dione and Aphrodite)
- Blurring: Thetis (cf. grieving mother Hecuba); Achilles (man/beast/god)
- 10) “More-than-human *menos* is characteristic in different ways of gods and of wild beasts: in this sense the raging warrior is poised between two extremes ... his movement can be articulated either as an impossible aspiration to divine glory or as a descent towards the reckless and self-destructive fury of a flesh-eating animal” (Clarke 2004:81)
- 11) “his thoughts are savage like a lion’s, who follows only his own great strength and his proud heart, and goes to make his meal on the flocks that men keep” (*Il.* 24.41-3)

B) War and heroism

12) “The paradox of heroism, that a hero must be high-spirited, proud, and capable of anger, but that anger and touchiness may make him a disaster and not a blessing to his people, is at the heart of the *Iliad*” (Griffin 1995 on *Il.* 9.109f.)

13) “That is why we should now be taking our stand at the front of the Lycian lines and facing the seat of battle, so that among the heavy-armoured Lycians people will say: ‘These are no worthless men who rule over us in Lycia, these kings we have who eat our fat sheep and drink the choice of our honey-sweet wine. No, they have strength too and courage, since they fight at the front of the Lycian lines’” (Sarpedon to Glaucus, *Il.* 12.315-21)

14) “There is a potential conflict between the individual excellence and the collaborative effort to achieve an end in unison: the individual may pursue his own prestige to the detriment of the army as a whole, as happens when Achilles dismisses his fellow-Greeks and allows them to die. Similarly Hector dreads the accusation, partly justified, that in his pride and self-confidence he has destroyed the host (22.107).” (Rutherford 1996: 41)

15) “Just as Achilles is trapped within the contradictions of a heroism he qualitatively transcends but to which he has no alternative, so Hektor, as the defender of his city, cannot escape the consequences of a heroic way of life that necessarily involves both his own destruction and the abandonment and destruction of the family he loves more than his city and more than all the world” (Schein 1984: 177)

- glory of war

- pathos of war

- i) sympathy for victims: epitaphs, similes

16) “He dropped his head to one side like a poppy in a garden” (*Il.* 8.306-7, Gorgythion)

17) “he fell with a crash, and his armour clattered around him. Blood soaked his hair, lovely as the Graces' hair, and his plaits tight-bound with gold and silver. As when a man nurtures a flourishing olive-shoot in a solitary place, where plenty of water wells up – a fine, healthy shoot it is, shaken by the breath of every wind that blows, and it blossoms thick with white flowers: but suddenly there comes a wind in a great storm, and uproots it from its trench and lays out its length on the earth. Such was the son of Panthoös, Euphorbos of the ash spear, as Menelaos son of Atreus killed him, and set to stripping his armour.” (Homer, *Iliad* 17.50-60)

- trees e.g. *Il.* 4.482ff. (Simeoisios); 5.559-560 (Orsilochos and Krethon); 13.389-391 (Asios = 16.482-484 of Sarpedon); 14.414ff. (Hector); NB 18.57 (Achilles: ominous.)

- ii) largely positive picture of Troy: family life; civilised. Trojan city v Greek camp

18) “But if anyone spoke harshly to me in the house - one of your brothers or sisters or your brothers' fine-dressed wives, or your mother ...- then you would speak winning words to them and stop them, through your own gentle-hearted way and your gentle words.” (Helen, of Hector *Il.* 24.768-72)

19) “Poor dear man, your own brave spirit will destroy you, and you have no pity for your baby son and for me your doomed wife, who will soon be your widow.” (Andromache, *Il.* 6.407-9)

20) “No, go back to the house and see to your own work, the loom and the distaff, and tell your

maids to set about their tasks. War will be the men's concerns, all the men whose homeland is Ilios, and mine above all." (*Il.* 6.490-93)

21) "In front of the city is a steep mound, standing alone in the plain with open space around it on all sides: men's name for it is Batieia, but the immortals call it the barrow of dancing Myrine" (*Il.* 2.811-14)

22) "there is a smooth going for horses round it- maybe it marks the grave of some man long dead, or was set up as a goal in earlier times." (*Il.* 23.330-32, landmark used as turning point)

iii) glimpses of peace: similes; the past; pictures on the shield of Achilles

23) "It is.... as though there lay behind the *Iliad* the whole world of peace and ordinary life, but only glimpsed through gaps or windows in the martial canvas which fills the foreground" (Taplin, 1980)

24) "the sides held even like the scales a careful spinning-woman holds, lifting the beam with the weight and the wool on either side, so she can earn a meagre provision for her children. So the battle was strained taut and level between them" (*Il.* 12.433-5)

25) "And they kept swarming round the body, as when flies in a sheepfold buzz round the brimming pails in the spring season, when milk is flooding the buckets. So they swarmed round the body." (*Il.* 16.641-3)

26) "here the twin springs of swirling Scamander shoot up from the ground. One spring runs with warm water, and steam rises all around it as if a fire were burning there. But the other even in summer flows out cold as hail, or frozen snow, or water turned to ice. There close beside these springs are the fine broad washing-troughs made of stone, where the Trojans' wives and their lovely daughters used to wash their bright clothes, in earlier times, in peace, before the sons of the Achaians came." (*Il.* 22.147-56)

27) "And on it he made two fine cities of mortal men. In one there were marriages and feasting, and they were escorting the brides from their houses through the streets under the light of burning torches, and the wedding-song rose loud." (*Il.* 18.490-93)

28) "The men had gathered in the market-place, where a quarrel was in progress, two men quarrelling over the blood-money for a man who had been killed: one claimed that he was making full compensation, and was showing it to the people, but the other refused to accept any payment: both were eager to take a decision from an arbitrator" (*Il.* 18.495-501)

29) "But when Achilles saw it [the armour], then the anger reached deeper into his heart, and his eyes glared out from his lids as if they were flames" (*Il.* 19.15-17)

C) A tragic epic?

30) "Achilles then in many respects foreshadows the heroes of tragedy, and in particular those of Sophocles' plays- in his defiant resolution, his impatience with consolation, his longing to die and so to remove the shame and guilt of his actions." (Rutherford 1982)

31) "Achilles is the archetypal tragic figure in his inability, for all his power and greatness, to dictate or influence the course of future events: for even when he seems most in control, his own plans and prestige form part of a wider picture which he can see only in details." (Rutherford 1982)

bibliography

- Clader, L. L. 1976. *Helen: the Evolution from divine to heroic in Greek epic tradition*
- Clarke, Michael. 2004. 'Manhood and heroism', in R. Fowler (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (Cambridge)
- Fowler, Don. 1987. 'Vergil on Killing Virgins', in *Homo Viator*, ed. Michael Whitby, Philip Hardie, Mary Whitby, 185-98
- Griffin, Jasper. 1980. *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford)
- Griffin, Jasper. 1995. (ed. and comm.), *Homer: Iliad IX*. (Oxford)
- Rutherford, Richard. 1982. 'Tragic form and feeling in the *Iliad*', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102: 145-60
- Rutherford, Richard. 1996 *Homer* (Greece and Rome New Survey)
- Schein, S. L. 1984. *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (California)
- Taplin, Oliver. 1992. *Homeric Soundings: the Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford)
- Taplin, Oliver. 1980. 'The Shield of Achilles within the *Iliad*', *Greece and Rome* 27: 1-21 (also in *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad* ed. Cairns, 2001)

For further reading on similes, see e.g.

- Buxton, R., 'Similes and other likenesses', *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* ed. R. Fowler (Cambridge, 2004), 139-155
- Coffey, M., 'The Function of the Homeric simile', *American Journal of Philology* 78 (1957), 113-32
- Edwards, M., *Homer, Poet of the Iliad* (1987)
- Moulton, C., 'Similes in the Iliad', *Hermes* 102 (1974), 381-97
- Mueller, M. *The Iliad*
- [online at <http://www.stoa.org/hopper/toc.jsp?doc=Stoa:text:2003.01.0002:chapter=1:section=3>]
- Scott, William C. *The Artistry of the Homeric Simile*. (2009)