Part I  Homer
1. δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς
Introduction

‘Homer’ suggests an answer which the maiden singers of Delos should give when they are asked who is the sweetest singer of all:

τυφλὸς ἀνήρ, οἰκεῖ δὲ Χίῳ ἔνι παιπαλέσσῃ,
τοῦ πάσαι μετόπισθεν ἀριστεύουσιν ἀοιδαί.

He is a blind man, and lives in rocky Chios;
The best songs are all his, for all time.

*Homer Hymn to Delian Apollo, 172–3*

This selection

Introductory passage: Akhilleus and Hektor (*Iliad* 22.1–130) page 6

Target passages: The death of Hektor (*Iliad* 22.131–end) page 23

Hektor and Andromakhe (*Iliad* 6.237–end) page 54

Homer and the Homeric poems

The *Iliad* (*Ἰλίας* (*ποίησις*), the epic about Ilium (*Ἰλίος*, or *Ἰλίον*, the city of Ilos, otherwise known as Troy)) – the story of the wrath of Akhilleus and its resolution during one stage of the Trojan War – and the *Odyssey* (*Ὀδύσσεια*) – the story of Odysseus’ return home after the Trojan War – emerged in Ionia in substantially the form in which we now have them, around 700 BC. Their authorship was attributed to Homer (*Ὀμήρος*). Their composition owes much to a tradition of oral recitation extending back many hundreds of years, with the result that the poems are oral in style (even if writing played a part in their final shaping, a point of dispute). The main feature of an oral style of composition is the repetition of words, phrases, sentences and even whole scenes. Scholars are divided on the question of whether the same man was responsible for both epics, and in what sense the two epics offer an accurate historical perspective. The influence of the two epics on Greek thought was very considerable.
Background to the Iliad

Paris (more often called Alexandros), son of the Trojan King Priam, has abducted and taken back to Ilium Helen, wife of the Greek King Menelaos (note that the name of the town is Ilium, Ἰλιόν in Greek; Troy – Τρόια – is the region). To win Helen back, Menelaos persuades his brother Agamemnon to lead an expedition of Greeks against Troy. Included in the expedition are such Greek heroes as Odysseus (Ulysses in Latin), Aias (Ajax), Diomedes, Patroklos and the greatest fighter of the Greeks, Akhilleus, son of the mortal man Peleus and divine Thetis, and close friend of Patroklos.

When the Iliad opens, a heaven-sent plague is spreading throughout the Greek army as it lays siege to Troy. Apollo has sent it, angry because Agamemnon has captured a Trojan girl, the daughter of the priest of Apollo, and refuses to allow her father to ransom her. Agamemnon releases the girl to stop the plague but, in accordance with his status and authority as leader of the expedition against Troy, demands in recompense (and gets) Briseis, a war-captive belonging to Akhilleus. When the furious Akhilleus withdraws from the fighting, taking with him his Myrmidon troops and his friend Patroklos, the Greeks are steadily driven back from Troy. Overtures to Akhilleus fail. When the Trojans reach and burn some Greek ships, Akhilleus permits Patroklostoreturntothefray. But Patroklos is killed by Hektor, son of King Priam and Troy’s greatest warrior. Akhilleus returns to the battlefield with revenge for Patroklos his only thought.

War and the Iliad

The context of the Iliad is war on the field of battle – between Greeks and Trojans, between hero and hero, between god and mortal. But the heart of the action is a human struggle of a different sort – in which the gods are centrally involved – and it is important not to allow the martial context to blur this essential point. Gabriel Germain writes:

I must ask the modern reader who wishes to feel the sweep of the Iliad to forget the feelings he has cultivated about war, whatever they are. For the bard, war is not material for theories or sentimentality. It is not a Judgement of God (though the gods wage it) or of History: it does not take the direction of an evolution, good or bad. It does not assume the divine rhythm of destruction and creation. Death on the field of battle is a simple reality which requires no commentary. It is confronted in the same way as the other crude realities of existence: they are accepted by the very fact that life is accepted. Homeric man never renounces life; that is why he has no ‘problem’ about death…

Considered thus, as a great phenomenon of nature, difficult for everyone at one time or another, painful for many, war is governed, at the level of man-to-man confrontation, by the law of the stronger. Such at least are the appearances as long as we do not see the supernatural background of events. It is here that the Iliad puts force at the centre of reality.

(Gabriel Germain, Homer, trs. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960))
Further reading

Introduction

Akhilleus, enraged by the death of Patroklos at the hands of the Trojan hero Hektor, has gone berserk, and single-handedly driven the Trojans back from the Greek lines towards Troy. The Trojans have been saved from complete rout by the intervention of Apollo who, disguising himself as the Trojan Agenor, diverted Akhilleus long enough for the Trojans to retreat within Troy’s gates. This extract begins with Akhilleus railing at Apollo for deceiving him.

In Book 16, Homer describes the death of Patroklos at Hektor’s hands and in Book 18 makes it clear that this was a tipping point: on hearing the news, Akhilleus decides to take his revenge on Hektor, even though he knows it will lead directly to his own death. Book 22 describes that revenge, after which Homer turns our attention to Priam and his family, who will have a major part to play in working out its consequences. This will culminate in Priam’s night journey to the Greek camp to ransom his son’s body. The poem will end with eulogies on Hektor by the three women in his life (Andromakhe, Hekabe and Helen), and his burial by the Trojans. Akhilleus’ original anger will have run its course.

In line 25 the poet shows us Priam and his wife Hekabe watching Hektor and Akhilleus from the walls of Ilium. One effect of showing us their reactions to their son’s plight is to concentrate our attention on the single combat they observe taking place below on the plain of Troy (and though Homer doesn’t mention them, we can also imagine the rest of the Trojans watching from their city walls and the Greeks from their camp; the gods, as always, view mortal events as if in a theatre).

This episode is, unsurprisingly, the longest fight scene in the Iliad (ll.131–369) though only sixty-odd lines describe the actual fight. Homer intensifies its significance by means of a concentrated run of similes: seven of them, full of images of speed and brilliance. (Similes usually occur in Homer at moments of heightened action or emotion.) There are also ten speeches by characters on the mortal plane (six by Hektor, four by Akhilleus), and six by gods (two from Zeus and four from Athene), showing the intense interest of the immortals in the outcome of the human conflict. If that is not enough, we have the famous description of the chase around Troy, including what must be...
one of the most poignant allusions to the former times of peace (ll.147–56), ‘before the sons of the Akhaians came’.

1 As the Trojans flee in terror back into the city of Troy, only Hektor remains outside the walls. Apollo taunts the furious Akhilleus. (1–24)

δῶς οἱ μὲν κατὰ ἄστυ περιζέωτες ἢτοι νεβροὶ ἵππῳ ἀπεφυέγοντο πῖον τ’ ἀκείστῳ ταῖς δίψαις, κεκλιμένοι καλῆσιν ἔπαλξεσιν—αὐτάρ Ἀχαιοὶ τεῖχος ἄσσον ἴσαν, σάκε ὡμοίοι κλίναντες.

“Εκτορα δ’ αὐτοῦ μεῖναι ὡμοίοι μοίρα πεθέσθην Ἰλίου προτάροφθεν πυλάδων ταῖς Σκαῖραις, αὐτάρ Πηλείωνα προσῆκε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων—‘τίππε με, Πηλέος úε, ποσὶν ταχέσσι διώκεις, αὐτός θυττός ἕων θεὸν ἀμβρόστον; οὐδὲ νῦ πώ με

1 ‘Why like, thus, so

οἱ μὲν: who must these be?

περιζέωτες = perf. part. of φέαυγο. A true perfect like this indicates state, not action

νεβροὶ, ὁ fawn (2a). Why fawns?

2 ἵππῳ (ἵπρόρτι), ὁ sweat (3a) (acc. ἵππῳ) ἀποφυέχωμαι I wipe off

τῖον = ἴππον, no augment ἀκέοντο: from ἄκεωμαι I SLAKE; no augment again

δίπα, ὁ thirst (1c)

3 κλίναμ, I lean (perf. part. pass. κεκλιμένος) καλῆσιν: dat. pl. f. (Attic καλάτη). The battlements are not especially beautiful; καλάς is a general word of approval, ‘fine, splendid’ ἐπάλξεσι, ὁ battle (3e)

αὐτάρ: in contrast to οἱ μὲν

* Ἀχαιοὶ, οἱ Akhaians, Greeks (2a). Homer has no word for Greeks, calling them Ἀχαιοῖ, Ἀργεῖοι, ‘Danaans’ or Δανάου ‘Danaans’

4 ἄσσον neuger (+ gen.)

Τίον = ἴππον

σάκος, τὸ shield (3c)

κλίναντες: here (acti.) with an object

5 “Εκτορα (Εκτορ-), ὁ Hektor (3a). Note his emphatic position; he has to be isolated for his single combat with Akhilleus. He will fight not only for personal glory but also in defence of his city and family; unlike Akhilleus, he has wider social responsibilities (see also l.541) αὐτοῦ there

*δῶς(ν) ὡς ὧν deadly

μέχρις the ‘explanatory’ or ‘expegeutive inf., which in Homer explains a nearby verb, here πεθέσθην, from πεθάνω I shackle, i.e. it forced him to stay

*μῶρα, ἡ fate (1b): always in Homer one’s personal fate or destiny, not an overriding force that affects everyone; frequently the moment of death (see l.303, also l.61 αἴσῃ)

πεθάνω I shackle, hold fast

6 Ἰλίου, τὸ (2b) or Ἰλίος, ὁ Ilium, Troy προτάροφθεν in front of (+ gen.); take with Ἰλίος and πυλάδων

πυλή, ὁ gate (1a)

*Σκαῖραι Σκαίανα Σκαιαί Gate (the Trojan gate overlooking the plain, facing the Greek camp, and a symbolic dividing line between the spheres of war and peace; Hektor says farewell to his wife here)

7 “Πηλείων (Πηλείων-), ὁ son of Peleus, Akhilleus (3a)

προσαυδάω I address. η here is the augment

*Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων, ὁ Phoibos Apollo. Phoibos is a title. Apollo supports the Trojans; disguising himself as Agenor, a Trojan warrior, he has been leading Akhilleus astray in order to distract him from his wholesale slaughter of the Trojans (21.596–611)

8 “τίππε = τί ποτε, a surprised ‘why’? Akhilleus may be famously swift-footed in pursuit but he is not fast enough to catch Apollo

*Πηλεύς, ὁ Peleus, father of Akhilleus (3g)

προσαυδάω = dat. pl. of ποσοῦ

9 θυττός ἡ ὄν immortal

ἴδον: the Ionic form of ῥᾶν (from ῥᾶ): Homer’s dialect, a composite of more than one form of Greek, is predominantly Ionic

ἄμβροτος ὄν immortal. What does ῥᾶν

ἀμβρότον agree with in l.8?

οὐδὲ…πῶ = οὐδὲπῶ, ‘not yet’
μέν

13 μέν: not contrasted here with δέ, but meaning "however"
κτείνεις: uncontracted (Ionic) form of fut. of κτείνω
τοι = σοι, ‘at your hands’

14 τόν = τοῦτον. δέ ή τό regularly occur in Homer where Attic uses οὗτος αὐτή τοῦτο
‘άγθεω I am angry
‘ἀκόμη άλλο (πάδας) swift (footed; πάδας = ‘as to his feet’, acc. of respect); Akhilleus is admired for his speed in pursuing an enemy worsted in single combat
‘Ἀχιλλής(οῦς, ὃ Akhilleus (3g)

15 βλάπτω: strike, cause to suffer
‘ιδιάργος on far-shooter (i.e. Apollo, the archer god)

16 τρέψας: turn with me

17 δέ: as often, following something that might have happened but didn’t, ‘but as it
was...’

18 κόσμος, τό glory, honour (3c). Like τιμή, this is what the Homeric hero lives for, and Akhilleus more than any. It is won above all on the battlefield, killing another hero (or many fighters). In an extended sense, like κλέος, it lives on after a man’s death in the songs of bards

άφελεο = unconstr. 2nd. aor. mid. of ἀφαιρέω, I take X (acc.) from Y (acc.)
2 Priam, king of Troy and Hektor’s father, observes Akhilleus’ onslaught and begs Hektor not to face him. (25–55)

τὸν [δ’ ὁ γέρων Πρίαμος πρῶτος ἴδεν ὀφθαλμοίσι,]

τοσοῦ ὃς: who are these?
"σώσομαι = plup. of σώσω, which often suggests a stately or swaggering walk

19 ἵππος ἄρα ἦς, ὁ ἄστερ, ὁ ἀστήρ, ὁ ἀστερός. Note the emphatic position τι: acc. of respect, ‘in any way’

τις, ὃς ἡ ῥῆνος
τις ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις

20 ὡς: Akhilleus’ speech is, as often, strong and assertive, even in the face of a god; though a mortal (albeit a powerful one), he is not afraid of Apollo. There is irony here, in that it is with Apollo’s help that Paris will kill Akhilleus (see ll.359–60)

τίπτομαι (τίς) ὡς I exact satisfaction from (+ acc.); a fut. unreal condition

πρός: from πόρος

21 προέτη (πρός) I fear

ὦς τις ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις

§ 26 παμφαίνω I shine brightly. This brilliant simile, comparing Akhilleus to a natural phenomenon, emphasizes both his shining new armour and his deadly power (see 1.27).

ςεύομαι I exact satisfaction from (+ acc.); a fut. unreal condition

22 ἰδεῖν, no augment

23 ὃς ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις

ίδειν: I shine brightly. This brilliant simile, comparing Akhilleus to a natural phenomenon, emphasizes both his shining new armour and his deadly power (see 1.27).

εἶδος τις ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις

24 παμφαίνω I shine brightly. This brilliant simile, comparing Akhilleus to a natural phenomenon, emphasizes both his shining new armour and his deadly power (see 1.27).

ἴδειν: I shine brightly. This brilliant simile, comparing Akhilleus to a natural phenomenon, emphasizes both his shining new armour and his deadly power (see 1.27).

ιδίναι: I shine brightly. This brilliant simile, comparing Akhilleus to a natural phenomenon, emphasizes both his shining new armour and his deadly power (see 1.27).

25 Priamos, ὁ Priam, king of Troy (2a)

πρῶτος: i.e. Priam is the first Trojan on the walls to catch sight of Akhilleus in all his glory. He realizes in a moment what is going to happen

εἶναι = εἶναι, no augment

26 σωματίω: I shine brightly. This brilliant simile, comparing Akhilleus to a natural phenomenon, emphasizes both his shining new armour and his deadly power (see 1.27).

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27 ὦς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις

28 ὦς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις

29 ὤριωνος: ὁ Ωρίων, the Dog Star, brightest of the fixed stars.

τίσις: who are these?

30 ὦς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις, ὡς τις
καὶ τε φέρει πολλὸν πυρετόν δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσιν·
καὶ τοῦ [χαλκός έλαμπε περι στήθεσι] θέοντος.
 physic, one cowardly

31 πυρετός, ὁ fever (2a)
32 δειλός ή ὁ wretched, cowardly

ὥς ...: when a poet working in the oral tradition goes on a digression (as in a simile) he has to remind his listeners when he is rejoining the narrative. Scholars call this technique ‘ring-composition’: ‘as X ... just so did the bronze ...’ For an extended example, see ll.673–8

τοῦ = τούτου
to, this

*χαλκός, ὁ bronze (armour), sword (2a)

*λάμπω I shine

*στήθος, τό (or στήθεα, τά) chest (3c uncontr.)

33 οἰμώζω I groan, lament