

Introduction

A. Homer and the *Iliad*

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the oldest works of European literature. Both were attributed by later Greeks to the poet Homer. But even for Greeks of the classical period Homer was a figure of legend. The historian Herodotus, who lived in the fifth century BCE, believed that Homer had lived 'no more than 400 years' before him (Herodotus 2.53), but there was general agreement that Homer's epics were composed earlier than any other surviving Greek poetry. However, we can say nothing for certain about Homer as a person. He does not mention himself in his poems, and there is no reference to any contemporary event. We cannot be sure that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are works of the same poet. There are grounds for an argument that they are not, though the author of the *Odyssey* was evidently familiar with the *Iliad*. All we know for certain is that most later Greeks attributed both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to a single individual whom they named 'Homer', along with a substantial collection of poems dedicated to individual gods (the *Homeric Hymns*, most of which are now thought to be later in date than the two epics).

We know that other epic poems were produced in the pre-classical era, though none survive except in small fragments, or as summaries or allusions preserved by later authors. Some of them were occasionally also attributed to Homer. There were epics dealing with the antecedents of the Trojan War, its course before the period covered by the *Iliad*, subsequent events leading up to the end of the war, the capture of Troy, and the later experiences of those who fought there. Still others dealt with mythological subjects not directly connected with Troy, such as the Theban legend. References within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* show awareness of other legendary narratives. The conventional name for this whole cluster of lost poems is the 'Epic Cycle'.

'Iliad' means 'Troy-story', from 'Ilios' (more familiar as the latinised 'Ilium'), an alternative name for the city. Greek mythology locates Troy on the Asian side of the Dardanelles ('Hellespont'). During the reign of its king, Priam, a Greek army attacked Troy, and eventually captured the city after a siege of ten years. ('Greek' is a word coined many centuries after this legendary time; Homer variously describes these people as 'Achaeans', 'Argives' or 'Danaans'.) The war arose because Priam's son Paris offended Menelaus, King of Sparta, by carrying off his wife Helen. Menelaus appealed to his brother Agamemnon, the most powerful of the Achaean chieftains; Agamemnon raised an army that combined forces provided by other rulers who accepted his authority. The greatest of them was Achilles, son of Peleus king of Phthia in northern Greece. Achilles became most passionately engaged in the war when his

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companion Patroclus was killed by the Trojan hero Hector. In fury Achilles killed Hector. His own death followed shortly afterwards, but so did the capture of Troy.

The *Iliad* covers fifty days in the final year of the war, stopping short of these two last events. Most of the poem concentrates on the few days leading up to the death of Patroclus in Book 16, which is the turning point of the whole epic. In *Reading Homer* we concentrate on that and on the reaction of Achilles (Book 18), which sets in train the tragic sequel. The poem ends with Hector's funeral.

For Homer, the war took place in a distant but unspecified past. ('Distant' partly because the poet regularly speaks of men as being bigger and stronger in those days.) Many elements of this past time are consistent with what we know of the Greek lands in the late Bronze Age towards the end of the second millennium BCE. The traditional date of 1184 BCE calculated by ancient scholars for the Fall of Troy may not be wide of the mark. Homer's centres of 'political' importance are Mycenae, Sparta, Pylos, Argos, Crete. Archaeology has shown that there were flourishing palace-based societies at all these places in this period. Conversely, little attention is given in the epics to places such as Athens and Delphi which did not become important until the eighth century. Bronze (rather than iron) is the material still almost exclusively used for weapons and armour. Many of the artefacts referred to in Homer can be shown to have a Bronze Age origin. The names of several of the gods are found on clay tablets written in Linear B (an early form of Greek) from Bronze Age sites. In 1870 Heinrich Schliemann excavated a Bronze Age city on the shore of the Dardanelles whose location was consistent with Homeric Troy. It had been damaged and rebuilt several times, suggesting there were indeed Trojan wars, probably fought over access to the Black Sea for trade. The search for history in Homer is endlessly fascinating, but of limited help in evaluating the *Iliad* as literature.

Ignorance about the author and his times focuses attention on the work. What matters most about the *Iliad* is that it is a great story, a story of war and heroes: glory, futility, triumph, defeat, suffering, love, friendship. Its principal theme is anger, and 'anger' is the first word: μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά ... 'Anger, goddess, sing to me of it ...'. It is the anger of Achilles, which, over the course of fifteen books, brings disaster to the Achaeans, then to Achilles himself, and finally to Priam and his city, whose fall is imminent at the end of the poem.

B. The story of the *Iliad*

The *Iliad* begins towards the end of the tenth and last year of the Trojan War. Agamemnon, leader of the Achaeans, has received as a war-prize the daughter of a priest of Apollo. Her father offers to ransom her. Agamemnon, against the universal will of the Achaeans, rejects him and insults him too. Apollo now sends a plague on the Achaeans. The prophet Calchas is aware of the reason for this and is encouraged by Achilles to say so in public 'even if you mention Agamemnon, who now claims to be far the best of the Achaeans' (1.90–1). Agamemnon, enraged, blames Achilles. He will concede in sending the girl back to her father, but he will take Achilles' prize-girl

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in compensation. Achilles bows to Agamemnon's authority and allows him to take his girl, but from now on will take no part in the fighting.

The conflict is between Agamemnon's power, military and political, and that of Achilles, physical and charismatic. It is also a conflict between generations, the older man with superior authority and the younger man who bears the brunt of the actual fighting. At the same time, it is not merely a quarrel at the human level. Achilles enlists the help of his mother, the sea-goddess Thetis. She goes on his behalf to Olympus and secures from Zeus a promise to support the Trojans until Agamemnon shows Achilles due respect.

Achilles now withdraws from the fighting. For seven books the theme of his anger remains in the background. On the one hand this long delay provides for the painfully slow working out of Zeus's promise. On the other it allows the poet to develop the second, unstated, theme of the poem. The *Iliad* is not only the story of Achilles' anger. It is the story of the whole ten-year Trojan War, compressed into the poem's time span of a few weeks. Book 2 lists the forces available to each side. In Book 3 we are presented with the two individuals whose dispute has involved all these forces. Paris, prince of Troy, has seduced Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta and brother of Agamemnon. A truce is declared while Paris and Menelaus fight a duel, with Helen as prize for the winner. The arrangement is implausible in the tenth year of fighting, but it serves as a convincing, compressed re-enactment of the start of the war. The duel is aborted when Aphrodite intervenes on behalf of her favourite, Paris, thus focusing our attention on the two characters most responsible for the conflict, one divine, the other human (see Section C (vii) below).

For the purposes of the *Iliad*, then, the war proper starts at the beginning of Book 4. Already in Book 3 the process has begun whereby we are gradually and with great care and variety introduced to the principal characters, both on the Trojan and on the Achaean side. Books 4–6 make it clear that the Achaeans are superior fighters: in particular the absence of Achilles is compensated by the presence of Diomedes, who dominates the battles throughout Book 5 and for much of 6, even wounding two gods supporting the Trojans, Aphrodite and Ares. (This sort of triumphant progress by a hero is given the name *aristeia*.) Achaean success provides the opportunity for an interlude inside the Trojan walls. Hector leaves the fighting in order to get his mother to make an (unsuccessful) offering to Athena and win her over; while in the city he has his famous, and last, conversation with his wife Andromache.

In Books 7 and 8, Zeus's promise to Thetis begins to be fulfilled. Limited Trojan success in 7 prompts the Achaeans to build a defensive wall and ditch around their camp. In 8 they are driven back to the ships, and the book concludes with the Trojans camped outside the Greek fortifications, their fires in the darkness like the stars of heaven. Now (Book 9) there is an appeal to Achilles: 'Come back to the fight and save us.' It comes not directly from Agamemnon but from Odysseus, the arch-persuader, Phoenix, an old member of Achilles' household, and Ajax, the greatest of the Achaeans after Achilles himself. Totally resistant at first, Achilles concludes by declaring that he will not return to the fight until the Trojan attack reaches his own ships.

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Book 10 is a night-time interlude. Odysseus and Diomedes undertake a spying mission into the Trojan camp; in the dark they encounter a Trojan spy on a corresponding errand. He reveals the location of the newly arrived Thracian prince Rhesus. The Achaean pair kill Rhesus and his companions and return to camp with his horses.

Book 11 sees the Achaeans fighting successfully until several of the heroes, major and minor, are wounded. The Achaeans fall back to the wall. Now Achilles tells Patroclus to enquire about one of the wounded. Patroclus meets the old king Nestor, who makes the fatal suggestion that Achilles should lend Patroclus his armour so that Patroclus, disguised, can frighten the Trojans away from the ships. For four long books (12–15) this suggestion is held in abeyance. During this time the Achaeans rally, aided by Poseidon and by Hera, who diverts Zeus's attention into an afternoon of lovemaking high on Mount Ida. During this time Hector is stunned by a great stone cast by Ajax, and temporarily disabled. When Zeus wakes, he restores Hector, and by the end of Book 15 the Trojans are on the point of setting fire to the ships. Only at this point (Book 16) does Patroclus get back to Achilles and persuade him to do as Nestor has suggested. Achilles orders Patroclus to do only what the situation requires and to come back to his camp as soon as the Trojans are driven off. Patroclus is carried away by his own success. He kills the Trojan hero Sarpedon, son of Zeus, but is then himself killed in an encounter with Hector and the god Apollo.

What will happen when the news reaches Achilles? This is delayed for the whole of Book 17, an agonising description of the battle for Patroclus' body (Hector has taken possession of the arms). At last, at the beginning of Book 18, young Antilochus reaches Achilles' camp and tells him. Achilles' overwhelming grief reaches his mother in the depths of the sea. She visits him; he tells her his one wish is to take revenge on Hector; she tells him that his own death will follow Hector's immediately. Now Achilles, unarmed, inspired by Hera and Athena, stands on the edge of the Achaeans' defensive ditch and utters a mighty battle cry. The Trojan advance is halted. Night falls, and the Trojans discuss whether to remain camped out in the plain. As Achilles has made his death certain by resolving to kill Hector, so Hector now makes his own death certain by persuading the Trojans to stay where they are and face Achilles in the morning. But for the moment there is a pause. Achilles' arms are in Hector's possession. Thetis will visit the smith-god Hephaestus on Olympus to have new ones made. The rest of Book 18 sees Thetis kindly received by Hephaestus and the arms, above all the shield, made and described.

Books 19–21 form a long prelude to the contest of Achilles and Hector. First, Agamemnon and Achilles are formally reconciled. Then (Book 20) Achilles goes into battle. To begin with he has a long and inconclusive encounter with Aeneas (who is rescued by Poseidon). His *aristeia* proceeds with the killing of a large number of lesser Trojans, and then (Book 21) he fights, first, two of the greater Trojan heroes, and then the river-god himself of Troy, the Scamander. Now he turns his attention to Hector, to be delayed by Apollo, who disguises himself as the Trojan Agenor and lures Achilles into chasing him far over the plain, giving the Trojans time to reach the city.

But Hector (Book 22) knows that he has brought the Trojans to this pass by his decision to spend the night on the plain. Shame forces him to await Achilles outside the gate. Then at the last minute he turns and runs away – until he is deceived by Athena into turning and facing Achilles. The duel is short. Hector dies. His body is dragged behind Achilles' chariot to the Achaean camp while the Trojans on the walls lament.

Book 23 deals with the funeral of Patroclus and the games held by Achilles in his honour. The Achaean heroes appear for the last time, now engaged in the activities of peace. But Achilles (Book 24), his rage unabated, continues to maltreat Hector's body, to the displeasure of the gods. Thetis is sent to persuade Achilles to accept a ransom and give the body up for burial. King Priam visits Achilles in the dead of night, and there is an intensely moving scene where the two of them recognise each other's humanity and grief. Priam recovers his son's body and the epic ends with Hector's funeral.

C. Reading Homer

(i) *Repetitions and oral theory*

Any reader of Homer will soon notice repeated expressions such as 'swift-footed Achilles' or 'winged words'. Sometimes a whole line, such as 'Then in turn wind-footed swift Iris spoke to him' (e.g. *Iliad* 18.183 = 196) is repeated. These repeated expressions are called 'formulae' (singular: 'formula') and regularly recurring adjectives such as 'swift-footed' for Achilles are called 'epithets'. The use of epithets and formulae in Homer has been much discussed, especially since the 1930s when Milman Parry proposed that these repeated expressions are evidence for the oral origin of Homeric epic poetry: the poet composed without writing but helped by the building blocks of formulaic expressions.¹ He demonstrated that there is an extensive system of formulae in Homeric verse, each designed to fit a particular place in a line of epic verse (see Section E below), helping the poet to maintain momentum in composing as he performs. Parry and his pupil Albert Lord backed up this theory by studying the practice of living singer-composers in the Balkans, drawing parallels in the use of formulaic expressions between Homer and the poetry of the southern Slavs.² They also claimed that the extensive system of formulae found in Homer cannot have been developed single-handedly by one poet, but will have resulted from many generations of singers expanding and handing down the stock phrases and techniques. If the claims of the Parry–Lord theory are accepted, Homer 'sang' rather than 'wrote' his poems.

1 His groundbreaking studies are published in A. Parry, ed. (1971) *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2 This comparative study is explained in A. B. Lord (1960, 2nd ed. 2000) *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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But if Homer only sang, how can so massive and well-structured a work as the *Iliad* have survived the death of its author? There were organised recitations of the whole *Iliad* and *Odyssey* at Athens from at least the sixth century BCE, indicating that written texts existed by this date. It is plausible (though unprovable) that they go back to the lifetime of the poet, usually put in the second half of the eighth century. (The *Odyssey* was seen by one ancient critic as the work of Homer's old age; if there were two poets, the *Odyssey* was perhaps composed a generation after the *Iliad* by a son, apprentice or admirer.) The Bronze Age Linear B script was as far as we know used only for palace records, and died out in the ensuing Dark Age. The Greek alphabet in roughly the form we know it seems to have been introduced in the early eighth century, adapted from Phoenician, which Greeks will have encountered in a new era of expansion and overseas trade. The new availability of writing may have inspired an exceptionally talented poet, trained as an oral bard, to conceive a work of unprecedented scale and sophistication, which he presumably worked on for many years, either writing it down himself or more plausibly dictating it to a scribe. On this view, the *Odyssey* then emulated the *Iliad*, making both epics the untypical and monumental end products of a vast and fluid oral tradition.

Written texts certainly did in due course circulate widely, but the epics remained oral poems in the important sense that most Greeks will have encountered them in performance, by professional reciters known as 'rhapsodes'. Written texts could themselves vary quite considerably, and it was the work of the scholars at the great Library in Alexandria in the third and second centuries BCE to establish a standard version. They are probably also responsible for the division of the *Iliad* (and likewise the *Odyssey*) into twenty-four books, traditionally designated by letters of the Greek alphabet (so Book 16 is Π and Book 18 is Σ). Each book would occupy a single scroll. Book divisions sometimes coincide with natural breaks in the narrative, sometimes not.

(ii) Themes

Repetitions are not confined to formulaic phrases and recurring lines. There are many stock themes, often following similar patterns and containing repeated expressions: the arming of a hero, sacrifice, a meal, bathing or the arrival of a visitor. The arming of Patroclus at 16.130–44 can be compared to that of Agamemnon at 11.15–46. The arrival of Thetis to Hephaestus at 18.369–90 can be compared to that of Agamemnon's representatives to Achilles at 9.185–200. Accounts of combat between individuals tend to start from a formulaic base (e.g. A throws a spear at B and misses, B retaliates but also misses, then A kills B with a sword), but this is frequently elaborated or varied.³ The poet can thus compose larger building blocks of his story, whilst also preventing the description of battles from becoming monotonous. Whole sequences of events can follow a common pattern. Book 16 and Book 18 start in a similar way,

3 Cf. B. Fenik (1968) *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad* (*Hermes Einzelschriften* 21), Wiesbaden: F. Steiner.

with bad news brought to Achilles, followed by his reaction to it. On a still larger scale, the narrative of the death of Patroclus in Book 16 and that of the death of Hector in Book 22 develop in parallel ways. Important advice (from Achilles to Patroclus, from Polydamas to Hector) is ignored. The victim is decisively weakened by a god (Patroclus by Apollo, Hector by Athena). The victor inflicts a fatal injury and the victim falls to the ground. The victor makes a speech of triumph, starting a dialogue that ends with the last words of the victim, warning that the victor's death will soon follow. The actual deaths are described in identical words (16.855–7 = 22.361–3). Hector rejects the prophecy of his own death; Achilles accepts it.

(iii) *Foreshadowing*

One death foreshadows another, and all the deaths within the poem foreshadow the big one beyond its end. Throughout the *Iliad* the poet suggests how the story will develop, sometimes in clear terms, sometimes by allusion. Perhaps the most provocative is 1.5, 'and Zeus's plan was accomplished'. Is this plan what he agrees with Thetis later in the book, that he will allow the Trojans to succeed until Agamemnon is forced to acknowledge his offence against Achilles? Is it also that this will lead to the death of Patroclus, then to that of Hector and to the fall of Troy? Does it imply a dark view of the nature of the gods, delighting in human misery? The death of Achilles is often foretold, in terms which become more specific as the event comes closer. At 1.352 he is 'born to live only a short while'. At 9.412–13 he can go home and live in safety, but his death is inevitable if he stays at Troy. At 18.96, he is told his death will follow immediately upon Hector's. More allusively, the scene at 18.35–51 where Thetis brings the sea-nymphs to Achilles' camp to mourn Patroclus' death seems to foreshadow another scene (*Odyssey* 24.47–9) where the same company assembles to mourn Achilles' own death. The structure of Book 16 is shaped by the poet's comment when Patroclus asks to be sent out as a substitute Achilles: 'Poor fool! He was asking for his own death' (16.46–7). Allusively, the death of the hero Epeigeus (16.570–5) may look forward to Patroclus' death. Epeigeus, like Patroclus, is 'best of the Myrmidons', and, like Patroclus, he has sought refuge among them after killing a man in his home country.

(iv) *Speeches*

Achilles' tutor Phoenix was charged by his father Peleus to make his son 'a speaker of words' as well as 'a doer of deeds' (9.443). Speeches occupy about 45 per cent of the *Iliad*. Achilles himself speaks almost 1,000 lines, his strong emotions often expressed in strong and unusual language. Characters evaluate events and each other in their speeches. We in turn evaluate them by what they say: the poet rarely steers us by commenting directly. Speeches within a single book can show a remarkable variety of style and effect.

In Book 16 speeches show us the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus. We have Achilles encouraging the Myrmidons and praying in vain to Zeus. Sarpedon

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encourages the Lycian allies of Troy and is himself the subject of a tense dialogue between Zeus and Hera. Dying at the hands of Patroclus, he urges on Glaucus, who in turn urges on Hector. Finally comes the exchange referred to above between Hector and the dying Patroclus.

Book 18 starts with an anxious monologue by Achilles. After Antilochus gives him the news, we have Thetis in conversation with the Nereids and with Achilles, then Iris (sent by Hera) with Achilles. The disagreement between Polydamas and Hector (the former impressively persuasive, though unsuccessful) returns us to the human battlefield. Achilles remorsefully addresses the Myrmidons and the dead Patroclus. Hera's gloating to Zeus about her success in bringing Achilles back into action is followed by the happier conversation of Thetis with Hephaestus and his hospitable wife. Homer presents the whole range of human and divine life in speech. This enabled the *Iliad* to provide a model for the later genre of tragic drama. It is also one reason why the epic has lent itself well to dramatisation for radio.

(v) *Similes and descriptions*

Homer's similes are famous and frequent: 'Just as ... a spring of dark water' (Patroclus' tears, 16.3); '... a little girl begging her mother to pick her up' (Achilles' gently mocking description of weeping Patroclus, 16.7); '... flies gathered round milk-pails' (of warriors fighting over Sarpedon's corpse, 16.641–3). They may consist of a couple of words (Thetis 'like a hawk', 18.616) or occupy a dozen lines. They may focus our attention on particular points of the scene described, or they may withdraw our attention from it on to something extraneous, a sort of relief from tension. The number of similes varies greatly from section to section of the poem: there are twenty-one in Book 16, only six of any substance in Book 18. The Myrmidons going out to battle qualify for three in quick succession (16.156–63, 212–13, 259–65): a means of underlining the structural importance as well as the vividness of this event. For any simile, the points of contact between it and the narrative from which it springs may be complex: they repay careful analysis.

Another method of varying the narrative consists of protracted descriptions. Such an extensive description is called *ekphrasis*. The description of the shield of Achilles being made by Hephaestus in *Iliad* 18.478–608 is the most extensive example in the poem. Agamemnon's shield is described (splendidly but briefly) at 11.32–40; the huge difference in length between the two descriptions draws attention to the relative importance of the characters.

(vi) *Heroic values*

Homeric heroes are concerned above all with defending their honour (*timē*) and winning glory (*kudos* or *kleos*). Achilles is dishonoured when Agamemnon takes away the girl who is his prize (*geras*) and the outward token of his *timē* (a word that significantly also means 'price'). The behaviour of heroes is determined by fear of disgrace and (still worse) ridicule: this is in anthropological terms a 'shame culture'

(in contrast to a 'guilt culture', where behaviour is determined by an internalised moral code — though such a stark dichotomy does less than justice to Homer). It is intensely competitive and individualistic. Excellence is primarily measured by prowess on the battlefield, though (as we have seen) wise words also rank very high. Revenge is accepted as natural. Achilles' fixation may be extreme, but it is never suggested that he is wrong to feel himself wronged by Agamemnon. 'Win great honour and glory for me', he instructs Patroclus (16.84), and Patroclus duly tells the Myrmidons they are to win back what Agamemnon has taken away (16.270–4).

Both sides in the war subscribe to the same values, just as they worship the same gods and (by literary convention) speak the same language. Sarpedon encourages his Lycians by appealing to their sense of shame (16.422), and one of the fullest statements of heroic values in the poem is his speech to his cousin and deputy Glaucus at 12.310–28 (see also (vii) below). The sense there of *noblesse oblige* (heroes must justify their privileges) reminds us that this is the code of a warrior elite, but also shows that considerations of social responsibility and justice have a place in the Homeric world.

Sarpedon before his killing by Patroclus is honoured with a shower of blood-stained raindrops from his father Zeus (16.459), and after it with miraculous transportation of his body to Lycia for burial by his kinsmen (16.676–83). He thus avoids in an especially privileged way what every hero dreads: to be denied proper burial, his body left as prey for dogs and carrion birds (1.4–5 and many other passages). Being unburied is a physical expression of being forgotten. Heroes seek recognition from their comrades, but they aspire also to what Achilles was offered by Thetis if he stayed and fought at Troy, a *kleos* that is imperishable (9.413). The poet was perhaps not unaware that it lay in his own gift to confer this.

(vii) Gods

Gods are vividly present throughout the *Iliad*. They are important to the epic in a number of ways, and it is hard to say that one is more important than another.

Their first three appearances are frightening. Zeus's will, that ambiguous phrase (see (iii) above), is mentioned in line 5 of Book 1. In 43 Apollo, enraged, comes like night upon the Achaeans and inflicts a plague on them. In 194 Athena, her eyes terrifyingly aflame, seizes Achilles by the hair as he is about to strike Agamemnon. But then at the end of Book 1 there is a scene of total contrast. It is on Olympus, at a gathering of the gods. Achilles' mother Thetis wheedles Zeus into agreeing to her request that he support her son in his dispute with Agamemnon. Zeus is, with reason, anxious that he may be in trouble with Hera if she spots him in private conversation with Thetis. A domestic dispute develops, which is resolved by Hephaestus bustling round and serving drinks to everyone.

One function of the gods then seems to be as a foil to human existence. The deadly seriousness of the dispute at the beginning of Book 1 is set against the lightheartedness of that at the end. The gods 'live easily'. And being immortal, they are a foil

in another sense, as appears in Book 12 when Sarpedon makes moving use of this point in his speech to Glaucus: 'If we were immortal, I would not trouble to fight; but as it is, death surrounds us on all sides: on with us then, and let us see whether we yield the glory to another or he to us' (12.322–8). A central idea in the *Iliad* is that mortality gives to human life a seriousness, urgency and potential for tragedy outside the experience of the gods. War intensifies and clarifies this awareness. Achilles' excellence lies in that he knows his own death will follow the success of his revenge, and yet he goes through with it.

There is a hierarchy of gods, and they are variously well- or ill-disposed towards the Trojans. At the head is Zeus, whose power is greater than that of all the rest put together. While not overtly hostile to Troy, he knows that Troy is fated to fall. Of the other gods, Hera, Athena, Poseidon and Hephaestus are hostile to the Trojans, while Apollo, Aphrodite, Ares and Artemis (who scarcely appears) support them. Hera and Athena are the most active and virulent in their hatred. This arose from the famous occasion when Paris, invited to name the most beautiful of the three goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, chose Aphrodite: the 'judgement of Paris', for which Paris was rewarded by the right to possess Helen, though this was the cause of the war. But apart from a passing reference in Book 24 the *Iliad* ignores the judgement of Paris: the hatred matters more than the reason for it. Hera demonstrates this when, rather than make any allowances for Troy, she offers to let Zeus destroy all her own favoured cities, Argos, Sparta and Mycenae (4.51–3). Of the pro-Trojan gods, only Apollo is treated with consistent respect: all the others are at one time or another humiliated either by a mortal or a fellow god.

Gods are ever present in human motivation, giving a man courage, strength or speed, or filling him with terror. Normally, for a hero to receive help from a god is a sign of the hero's excellence rather than his weakness. Occasionally the opposite point can be made: Patroclus belittles Hector's triumph over him by attributing his success to Apollo (16.849–50).

Of one idea there is little mention: that the gods are concerned with morality and what is right. Menelaus at 13.625 appeals to Zeus as the 'god of hosts and guests' (ξείνιος) who should punish the Trojans because Paris betrayed his host. At 16.385–8 (in a simile) Zeus sends torrential rain to punish men for giving crooked judgements. In Book 24 the gods 'pity' Hector (23) and Apollo condemns Achilles as 'shameless' (44). But these instances are rare and exceptional. For the most part, those whom the gods of the *Iliad* favour are their children or enemies of their enemies. The *Odyssey* (with its hero's recurrent question about unknown people 'Are they god-fearing and friendly to strangers?') seems to reflect a different world view.

D. Homer's language

Homer's Greek is a mixture of different dialects, which makes it likely that it is an artificial language devised (by generations of oral poets) for the purpose of epic