



The
Iliad

HOMER



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LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS™

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ISBN 978-1-58049-670-4

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Notes

What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

What is known about the life of Homer is based primarily on scholarly speculation, not hard facts. His birth has been dated as far back as 1200 B.C., but based on the style evident in his two major poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, some historians think he lived much later. In fact, a few ancient Greek writers who investigated his life believe that the works attributed to him were actually written by a woman. Some modern critics and others come to a different conclusion: a group of Homer's students or followers, who adapted and lengthened popular ballads of the time, composed both epic poems.

Seven different Greek cities claim that Homer was born within their boundaries, but since scholars cannot even agree whether Homer was an actual person, there is much doubt about these claims.

In the sixth century B.C., the stories of the Trojan War and Odysseus' long journey home were gathered and arranged in the order they are in at present so they could be recited at an Athenian festival. The *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, as we know them, both date from these oral presentations.

Pointers

READING POINTERS

Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

General Information

The Iliad is an epic poem that dates back to approximately the 8th century B.C. Although no one knows for certain who originally composed the poem, it is attributed to a blind poet named Homer, who is believed to have lived during that time period. It is theorized that *The Iliad* was probably composed by many different poets over a long period of time, Homer being the most well known. Additionally, the poem dates to a time when writing had just begun for the Greeks. Up until that time, stories were told and handed down through an oral tradition. *The Iliad* is most likely the culmination of many different stories linked together orally and later put into writing by numerous poets and scribes.

Genre

The epic poem usually contains many of the following characteristics, among others:

- an origin in the ancient oral tradition of storytelling
- a noble hero representing his country, race, or all of humankind
- the deeds of warriors and heroes in battle
- repetition and recurring themes
- involvement of the gods
- the invoking of a muse to aid the narrator in telling the story
- a lofty and serious tone
- the use of epic similes
- foreshadowing by humans, as well as by gods
- elaborate catalogs and inventories
- monumental battle scenes

Gods and Goddesses Appearing in *The Iliad*

Note: This list is alphabetized with Roman names first and Greek names in brackets in order to match the Touchstone Edition of *The Iliad*. For Greek and Roman names that are the same, no Greek name is given.

- Apollo** – god of the sun, music, healing, and light
Bacchus [Greek: *Dionysus*] – god of wine
Boreas – god of the north wind
Ceres [Greek: *Demeter*] – goddess of the harvest
Dawn [Greek: *Eos*] – goddess of the dawn
Diana [Greek: *Artemis*] – goddess of the moon and hunting; protector of women
Eilithuia – goddesses of childbirth
Hades (also *Pluto*) – god of the underworld
Hebe – goddess of youth
Hymen [Greek: *Hymenaeus*] – god of wedding ceremonies and marriage
Hyperion – god of light
Iapetus – the Titan who fathered Prometheus and Atlas; considered a father and protector of humankind
Iris – goddess of the rainbow and a messenger for the gods
Jove [Greek: *Zeus*] – king of the gods; god of light and the sky
Juno [Greek: *Hera*] – queen of the gods; goddess of marriage and childbirth
Mars [Greek: *Ares*] – god of war
Mercury [Greek: *Hermes*] – messenger of the gods; god of wealth, luck, and travelers
Minerva [Greek: *Athena*] – goddess of wisdom, justice, art, invention, and industry
Neptune [Greek: *Poseidon*] – god of the sea
Night [Greek: *Nyx*] – goddess of the night
Oceanus – god of the outer sea (the sea surrounding the earth)
Proserpine [Greek: *Persephone*] – queen of the underworld
Rhaea – mother of the Olympian gods and goddesses
Saturn [Greek: *Kronos*] – father of the Olympians and ruler of the universe before Jove's reign began
Tethys – goddess of the sea
Themis – goddess of law, justice, and order
Venus [Greek: *Aphrodite*] – goddess of love
Vulcan [Greek: *Hephaestus*] – god of fire and metalworking
Zephyrus – god of the west wind



B O O K I

*The quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles,
Achilles withdraws from the war, and sends his mother
Thetis to ask Jove to help the Trojans,†
Scene between Jove and Juno on Olympus†*

SING, O GODDESS,† the anger of Achilles† son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans.† Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades, and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures, for so were the counsels of Jove fulfilled from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men, and great Achilles, first fell out with one another.

And which of the gods was it that set them on to quarrel? It was the son of Jove and Leto; for he was angry with the king and sent a pestilence upon the host to plague the people, because the son of Atreus had dishonoured Chryses his priest. Now Chryses had come to the ships of the Achaeans to free his daughter, and had brought with him a great ransom: moreover he bore in his hand the sceptre of Apollo wreathed with a suppliant's wreath, and he besought the Achaeans, but most of all the two sons of Atreus, who were their chiefs.

“Sons of Atreus,” he cried, “and all other Achaeans, may the gods who dwell in Olympus grant you to sack the city of Priam, and to reach your homes in safety; but free my daughter, and accept a ransom for her, in reverence to Apollo, son of Jove.”

†Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.

On this the rest of the Achaeans with one voice were for respecting the priest and taking the ransom that he offered; but not so Agamemnon, who spoke fiercely to him and sent him roughly away. "Old man," said he, "let me not find you tarrying about our ships, nor yet coming hereafter. Your sceptre of the god and your wreath shall profit you nothing. I will not free her. She shall grow old in my house at Argos far from her own home, busying herself with her loom and visiting my couch; so go, and do not provoke me or it shall be the worse for you."

The old man feared him and obeyed. Not a word he spoke, but went by the shore of the sounding sea, and prayed apart to King Apollo whom lovely Leto had borne. "Hear me," he cried, "O god of the silver bow, that protectest Chryse and holy Cilla and rulest Tenedos with thy might, hear me O thou of Sminthe.† If I have ever decked your temple with garlands, or burned your thigh-bones in fat of bulls or goats,† grant my prayer, and let your arrows avenge these my tears upon the Danaans."†

Thus did he pray, and Apollo heard his prayer. He came down furious from the summits of Olympus, with his bow and his quiver upon his shoulder, and the arrows rattled on his back with the rage that trembled within him. He sat himself down away from the ships with a face as dark as night, and his silver bow rang death as he shot his arrow in the midst of them. First he smote their mules and their hounds, but presently he aimed his shafts at the people themselves, and all day long the pyres of the dead were burning.

For nine whole days he shot his arrows among the people, but upon the tenth day Achilles called them in assembly—moved thereto by Juno, who saw the Achaeans in their death-throes and had compassion upon them. Then, when they were got together, he rose and spoke among them.

"Son of Atreus," said he, "I deem that we should now turn roving home if we would escape destruction, for we are being cut down by war and pestilence at once. Let us ask some priest or prophet, or some reader of dreams (for dreams, too, are of Jove) who can tell us why Phoebus Apollo is so angry, and say whether it is for some vow that we have broken, or hecatomb that we have not offered, and whether he will accept the savour of lambs and goats without blemish, so as to take away the plague from us."

With these words he sat down, and Calchas son of Thestor, wisest of augurs, who knew things past, present, and to come, rose to speak. He it was who had guided the Achaeans with their fleet to Ilius,† through the prophesyings with which Phoebus Apollo had inspired him. With all sincerity and goodwill he addressed them thus:

"Achilles, loved of heaven, you bid me tell you about the anger of King Apollo, I will therefore do so; but consider first and swear that you will stand by me heartily in word and deed, for I know that I shall offend one who rules

the Argives[†] with might, and to whom all the Achaeans are in subjection. A plain man cannot stand against the anger of a king, who if he swallow his displeasure now, will yet nurse revenge till he has wreaked it. Consider, therefore, whether or no you will protect me.”

And Achilles answered, “Fear not, but speak as it is borne in upon you from heaven, for by Apollo, Calchas, to whom you pray, and whose oracles you reveal to us, not a Danaan at our ships shall lay his hand upon you, while I yet live to look upon the face of the earth—no, not though you name Agamemnon himself, who is by far the foremost of the Achaeans.”

Thereon the seer spoke boldly. “The god,” he said, “is angry neither about vow nor hecatomb, but for his priest’s sake, whom Agamemnon has dishonoured, in that he would not free his daughter nor take a ransom for her; therefore has he sent these evils upon us, and will yet send others. He will not deliver the Danaans from this pestilence till Agamemnon has restored the girl without fee or ransom to her father, and has sent a holy hecatomb to Chryse. Thus we may perhaps appease him.”

With these words he sat down, and Agamemnon rose in anger. His heart was black with rage, and his eyes flashed fire as he scowled on Calchas and said, “Seer of evil, you never yet prophesied smooth things concerning me, but have ever loved to foretell that which was evil. You have brought me neither comfort nor performance; and now you come seeing among the Danaans, and saying that Apollo has plagued us because I would not take a ransom for this girl, the daughter of Chryses. I have set my heart on keeping her in my own house, for I love her better even than my own wife Clytemnestra, whose peer she is alike in form and feature, in understanding and accomplishments. Still I will give her up if I must, for I would have the people live, not die; but you must find me a prize instead, or I alone among the Argives shall be without one. This is not well; for you behold, all of you, that my prize is to go elsewhere.”

And Achilles answered, “Most noble son of Atreus, covetous beyond all mankind, how shall the Achaeans find you another prize? We have no common store from which to take one. Those we took from the cities have been awarded; we cannot disallow the awards that have been made already. Give this girl, therefore, to the god, and if ever Jove grants us to sack the city of Troy we will requite you three and fourfold.”

Then Agamemnon said, “Achilles, valiant though you be, you shall not thus outwit me. You shall not overreach and you shall not persuade me. Are you to keep your own prize, while I sit tamely under my loss and give up the girl at your bidding? Let the Achaeans find me a prize in fair exchange to my liking, or I will come and take your own, or that of Ajax or of Ulysses;[†] and he to whomsoever I may come shall rue my coming. But of this we will take thought hereafter; for the present, let us draw a ship into the sea, and

find a crew for her expressly; let us put a hecatomb on board, and let us send Chryseis also; further, let some chief man among us be in command, either Ajax, or Idomeneus, or yourself, son of Peleus, mighty warrior that you are, that we may offer sacrifice and appease the anger of the god.”

Achilles scowled at him and answered, “You are steeped in insolence and lust of gain. With what heart can any of the Achaeans do your bidding, either on foray or in open fighting? I came not warring here for any ill the Trojans had done me. I have no quarrel with them. They have not raided my cattle nor my horses, nor cut down my harvests on the rich plains of Phthia; for between me and them there is a great space, both mountain and sounding sea. We have followed you, Sir Insolence! for your pleasure, not ours—to gain satisfaction from the Trojans for your shameless self and for Menelaus. You forget this, and threaten to rob me of the prize for which I have toiled, and which the sons of the Achaeans have given me. Never when the Achaeans sack any rich city of the Trojans do I receive so good a prize as you do, though it is my hands that do the better part of the fighting. When the sharing comes, your share is far the largest, and I, forsooth, must go back to my ships, take what I can get and be thankful, when my labour of fighting is done. Now, therefore, I shall go back to Phthia; it will be much better for me to return home with my ships, for I will not stay here dishonoured to gather gold and substance for you.”

And Agamemnon answered, “Fly if you will, I shall make you no prayers to stay you. I have others here who will do me honour, and above all Jove, the lord of counsel. There is no king here so hateful to me as you are, for you are ever quarrelsome and ill-affected. What though you be brave? Was it not heaven that made you so? Go home, then, with your ships and comrades to lord it over the Myrmidons.[†] I care neither for you nor for your anger; and thus will I do: since Phoebus Apollo is taking Chryseis from me, I shall send her with my ship and my followers, but I shall come to your tent and take your own prize Briseis, that you may learn how much stronger I am than you are, and that another may fear to set himself up as equal or comparable with me.”

The son of Peleus was furious, and his heart within his shaggy breast was divided whether to draw his sword, push the others aside, and kill the son of Atreus, or to restrain himself and check his anger. While he was thus in two minds, and was drawing his mighty sword from its scabbard, Minerva came down from heaven (for Juno had sent her in the love she bore to them both), and seized the son of Peleus by his yellow hair, visible to him alone, for of the others no man could see her. Achilles turned in amaze, and by the fire that flashed from her eyes at once knew that she was Minerva. “Why are you here,” said he, “daughter of aegis-bearing Jove? To see the pride of Agamemnon, son of Atreus? Let me tell you—and it shall surely be—he shall pay for this insolence with his life.”

Glossary

Book I

Trojans – the citizens of Troy, an ancient city located in present-day western Turkey, where, according to legend, the Trojan War took place

Olympus – a mountain in northeastern Greece; according to Greek mythology, the gods lived on another Mount Olympus, however. Olympus was a place of perfection, above the earth's physical mountains. It should not be interpreted as the Greek concept of "heaven," though.

"Sing, O goddess" – One characteristic of the genre of the epic poem is the narrator's act of invoking a muse to help tell the story. The Muses were nine daughters of Jove, each of whom governed a particular science or art form. The narrator of *The Iliad* is probably referring to Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry. The other eight Muses and their domains are: Clio (history), Erato (love poetry), Euterpe (music), Melpomene (tragedy), Polyhymnia (sacred poetry), Terpsichore (dance), Thalia (comedy), and Urania (astronomy).

"the anger of Achilles" – Achilles' anger at Agamemnon is the main conflict in the poem and provides the set-up for the events to come. Achilles' wounded pride is what keeps him in a rage, but it also makes him refuse to fight, leading to terrible consequences for the rest of the Achaean army. Achilles embodies one of the main themes of *The Iliad*: the foolish and self-destructive nature of pride.

Priam, Menelaus – kings, respectively, of the Trojans and the Greeks; Menelaus had been married to Helen before Paris' abduction of her, and Priam is Paris' father.

Achaeans – the main name given to the Greek forces in *The Iliad*; they consisted of various ancient tribes located in and around present-day Greece.

Sminthe [Greek: *Smintheus*] – another name for the god Apollo; the name relates to mice and indicates that Apollo was also the "mouse god." Mice were highly regarded in ancient Greek society because they supposedly arose from the vapors of the earth and had prophetic powers.

"burned your...bulls or goats" – the ritual sacrificing of animals in order to please the gods

Danaans – another name for the Greek forces

Ilium [*Ilium*] – the Latin name for Troy; the word *Iliad* loosely means the story about Ilium.

Argives – another name for the Greek forces; the word *Argives* derives from the ancient city of Argos.

Ulysses – Ulysses is the Latin name for the Greek hero Odysseus, who plays a role in *The Iliad*, but is more famous for being the hero of *The Odyssey*,

Vocabulary

Book I

abode – remained, stayed

aegis-bearing – giving sponsorship or protection

aloof – distant, detached

ambrosial – divine; belonging to the gods

ambuscade – an ambush

appease – to pacify or placate

augurs – people who can predict the future

beseech – to beg or plead

besought – begged

chanting – a variation of the word *chanting*

consummate – expert, flawless

covetous – jealous, envious

disquieted – worried, uneasy

facile – fluent in an easy or effortless way

foray – a raid or sudden attack

forestays – strong ropes extending from the mast to the bow of a sailing ship

forsooth – truly

furled – rolled up

hawsers – cables used in anchoring a ship

hecatomb – a public sacrifice to the gods consisting of the killing of a large quantity of animals

hence – from now

hied – hurried

hind – a female deer

hoar – grayish-white in color

host – an army

insolence – disrespect

loom – a machine used for making cloth

loth [*loath*] – unwilling, reluctant

lyre – a musical instrument similar to a harp

meed [*archaic*] – a reward

merman – a mythological creature with the head and body of a man and the tail of a fish

mooring-stones – heavy stones used to anchor a ship

oracles – fortune-tellers, seers

pacify – to appease; to calm

paean – a song of praise

pestilence – a plague or a deadly disease