

A GUIDE TO THE ILIAD

The Iliad has 15,693 lines. The poem opens in the tenth year of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans; the scene is the Greek (Achaean) camp on the Trojan plain; the story spans a period of 52 days.

Homer's declared theme in the first line of the poem is the anger of Achilles. This anger and its consequences occupy four days.

BOOK 1 The Quarrel

Read the invocation (appeal to the Muse); it gives the theme to the Iliad.

Apollo sends a plague on the Greeks in response to a request by his priest Chryses, whose daughter, Chryseis, is part of Agamemnon's booty. Agamemnon and Achilles quarrel over booty and leadership. Agamemnon returns Chryseis, but takes as a replacement Achilles' prize Briseis. Achilles' appeal to his mother Thetis results in his withdrawal from battle. The book ends on Olympus, where a petty quarrel between the gods contrasts with the major quarrel between the two agathoi over time on earth.

Read page 38-9: 'This made the ox-eyed queen...' -end, about the attitude and behaviour of the gods. (Homeric laughter).

BOOK 2 The Forces are displayed

The events of books 2-7 occupy a single day.

Zeus' promise to Thetis in book 1 swings into action with a false dream sent to Agamemnon. There follows the testing of the troops (characterisation of Agamemnon), the outburst of Thersites (Read pages 45-6: 'They all sat down.'), and Odysseus' "take-over" of the command - all these reinforce the criticisms aimed at Agamemnon by Achilles in book 1. The Greek army gathers: catalogue of Greek forces; this is almost like a flashback serving to provide information required by the audience at the start of the poem. (Interpolation?)

BOOK 3 A Truce and a Duel

Paris/Menelaos duel. A chance to meet the two men demanding Helen. We are also introduced to Helen and the Trojans (teichoskopia); thus, this book serves to emphasize the causes of the war. Read page 67-8 for characterisation of Helen; 'She found Helen...' pages 72ff for characterisation of Paris, (arming scene, duel and bedroom scene) 'The troops sat down in rows.....'

BOOK 4 Pandarus breaks the truce

Starts on Olympus with the grim spectacle of the interplay between men and gods. Agamemnon reviews his troops ('epipoleis'), providing us with the opportunity to meet the leading Greeks (interpolation?). Full scale fighting breaks out. Athene's ruthlessness in using Pandarus to break the truce: Read Page 79ff 'While the Achaeans....'

Read page 88: 'And now battalion...' (similes to introduce the fighting). Diomedes is introduced. He will 'star' in book 5.

BOOK 5

Diomedes fights the gods

Full scale fighting continues; Agamemnon's cruelty is shown. The 'aristeia' of Diomedes. Physical presence of the gods on the battlefield, even of Aphrodite, who saves Paris, but is 'wounded' as she tries to save Aeneas. Read Agamemnon's exhortation to his troops (page 106); 'My friends, he said...' - an important statement about honour.

BOOK 6

Hector and Andromache

Trojans beaten back to Troy (Ilion). Hector urges women of Troy to help the war effort by making offerings to Athene. Diomedes/ Glaucus meeting (xenia). Scenes in Troy with Hector and the women in his life - Hecuba, Helen, and Andromache (compare Paris in book 3). Hector parts from Andromache, with forboding of his death. book highlights the suffering of innocents in war.

Read pp. 122-123; 'Glaucus' tale delighted... 'Diomedes and Glaucus exchange armour, highlights acquisitiveness of the heroes and working of xenia.

Read page 129; 'As he finished, glorious Hector...' Astyanax frightened by father in armour.

BOOK 7

Alas fights Hector

Hector and Paris rally the Trojans. Hector and Alas duel, which darkness halts; the duellists exchange gifts. The Greeks reject Trojan conciliation proposal of the return of Helen's possessions. Truce for the cremation of Greek and Trojan dead. Greeks build wall and ditch to defend camp and ships.

Fighting in this book typical of the first 9 years of the war.

Stubbornness prevents rational settlement of the war; there is no compromise.

Nestor's proposal to build wall: why now? Becomes significant in book 12.

BOOK 8

The Trojans reach the wall

Starts on Olympus - gods forbidden to intervene in the fighting (contrast book 5), so fulfilling promise made to Thetis in book 1 that Trojans would enjoy success until Achilles had been compensated. Fighting equal until mid-day when Zeus uses his scales (see them again in book 22) and the Greeks are driven inside their new defences. The book ends (l. 489 - end) with a glimpse of the Trojan camp at night (compare Henry V, Act 4 Prologue).

Read pages 159-60: 'Thus all night long...' . Famous end to the book.

BOOK 9

Overtures to Achilles

Greek leaders debate what to do in the crisis situation. Nestor blames Agamemnon for his folly of insulting Achilles who must now be reconciled to ensure that the Greeks do not lose the war. Embassey of Odysseus, Ajax and Achilles' tutor, Phoenix to Achilles. Each appeal to him in turn and offer him enormous recompense. Achilles' response is modified after each appeal, and he finally agrees to fight when the Trojans reach the huts and dhips of his Myrmidons.

Thought by some to be finest book in Iliad - but is it interpolation? The embassey is not mentioned later...

Read Agamemnon's speech (Page 161: 'They sat down to the assembly... fall

to us) and compare book 2 where he was only testing! See also book 14. Important characterisation of Agamemnon.
Read pages 163-4: 'Your majesty, Agamemnon...apology' Nestor's wise counsel and blaming of Agamemnon. Agamemnon blames it on 'blind folly'.
The six speeches:

1. Odysseus:
offers the compensation
2. Achilles:
rejects them - Read pages 169-171: 'All I have suffered...humiliation I endured.'
Threatens to go home tomorrow
3. Phoenix:
recommends forgiveness (Parable of the Prayers)
Read Page 174; 'Conquer your pride Achilles...'
Story of Meleager - example of one who did not accept gifts and suffered for it. (Achilles suffers - will lose Patroclus)
4. Achilles:
Says he will decide tomorrow about sailing home
5. Aias:
Simple speech of straightforward soldier; take the money as compensation, a new idea to replace vendetta.
6. Achilles:
Read page 178; 'Your highness, Aias...' his position shifts again, he will only consider fighting when the situation is really desperate.

Odysseus reports back to Agamemnon, but only mentions the first threat of Achilles and not subsequent shifts. (Implies failure of the mission)

BOOK 10

Night Interlude

Called the "Doloneia". The leaders are unable to sleep, both Greek and Trojan. Diomedes and Odysseus set out to spy on the Trojan camp (Nestor's idea). En route, they capture the Trojan spy, Dolon, whom they kill after extracting information from him. In the Trojan camp, they kill Rhesus and steal his horses. Note the animal skins in which the 'stalking spies' dress. A self-contained book, with the possibility of interpolation.

BOOK 11

Achilles takes notice

Full scale fighting; the "aristeia" of Agamemnon. Agamemnon, Diomedes and Odysseus are all wounded. Paris has 3 victims! including Diomedes in the foot (foreshadowing of Achilles' fatal wound?)

Achilles sends Patroclus to Nestor (l. 598) to find out who is wounded. Nestor urges Patroclus to ask Achilles to allow Patroclus to return to battle. (l. 795)

Read page 213; inconsistency of '... at last I see the Achaeans...'?

Read page 218; Nestor beginning to work on Patroclus.

N.B. Important statement of Heroic Code: 'While the old man Peleus exhorted his boy Achilles *always to strive for the foremost place and outdo his peers.....*'

BOOK 12

Hector storms the wall

Full scale fighting. Trojans breach the Greek defensive wall and the Greeks are trapped between fire and water. Sarpedon is in the forefront:
 Read page 229; important statement regarding responsibilities of the hero. ('noblesse oblige') 'Glaucus', he said, 'why do.... for ourselves'

BOOK 13

The battle at the ships

The Trojans pour into Greek camp but Zeus turns his eyes away from Troy, so Poseidon intervenes on the Greek side. Many Trojan leaders are wounded (compare Greeks in book 11).

Read page 235; characterisation of Hector as 'madman'.

Read page 250; gory description of fighting.

The theme of slaughter and gluttony is throughout; it numbs the senses but it is localised to small area of the world, hence Zeus's indifference: Read page 234 'When Zeus had.... Danaan arms'

BOOK 14

Zeus outmanoeuvred

Discussion between the three Greeks wounded in book 11 and Nestor: this offers insight into their characters. Read page 258-9 for Agamemnon: 'Nestor, said Agamemnon.....fatal leadership'. N.B. Odysseus shows far better understanding of psychology of the troops than Agamemnon does! Poseidon urges on the Greeks.

Zeus seduced by Hera; Read pages 261-262 where she 'arms' for battle: 'Now Hera....shimmering feet' Note Hera gets help from Aphrodite because she needs to inspire passion in her husband. This allows the battle to rage. Hector wounded.

Note contrast in this book: divine bed of flowers on which Zeus and Hera make love; the cruel slaughter of the humans. Read page 266 and 270.

BOOK 15

The Achaeans at bay

Zeus awakes and prophesies the future. He punishes Hera - verbally. The Greeks are driven back again. Apollo smashes the Greek wall. Hector reaches the ships, opposed only by Ajax, and demands fire.

BOOK 16

Patroclus fights and dies

Achilles allows Patroclus to fight, dressed in his armour. He instructs Patroclus to stop once he has driven the Trojans from the ships. A Greek ship is fired; Patroclus and the Myrmidons quench the fire and drive the Trojans back. Patroclus/Sarpedon duel. Patroclus attacks the walls of Troy and is killed by a combination of Apollo, Euphorbus and Hector.

This marks the turning point in the Iliad; with the deaths of Patroclus and Sarpedon a note of TRAGEDY is introduced. Note the arming scene, typical but clear that Patroclus is no Achilles; Read pages 295-6: 'Patroclus put onto his noble foes.' Patroclus enjoys his Aristeia, but his killing is almost ritualistic. His sacrifice alone will serve to bring back Achilles.

Read page 294: 'Nevertheless, Patroclus...single-handed'; contradiction of the embassy in book 9?

Fighting over Patroclus' body. Menelaos/Euphorbos duel (n. b. sympathetic treatment of Euphorbos, even though he was one of Patroclus' killers). Trojans strip Patroclus of his armour. Further fighting over his body. Achilles is distressed and promised new armour by Thetis.

Read page 328, for statement of human condition ('The Son of Cronos... man')

Read 333, for the famous fog-bound line 'Kill us in daylight, if you must.'

Achilles informed of Patroclus' death; his grief (which heralds the beginning of the end of his withdrawal) is intense. Thetis visits Achilles (compare book 1). Achilles appears at the Greek ditch and the sight of him is enough to scare the Trojans from Patroclus' body. He brings the body back. At a Trojan assembly, Hector rejects the advice to retreat into the city. Note the deterioration in Hector's character: Read page 341, where Hector 'has set his heart on dragging off Patroclus. He wants to cut his head off The Greeks mourn for Patroclus all night long. Note the change in direction of Achilles' anger: Read page 345-6: 'So, then, Patroclus... of men.' Hephaistos makes new armour for Achilles.

N. B. Achilles' new shield:

It is a symbol of order (kosmos); of the world, stars and their courses; man's order, the harvest and the cattle - the very order being destroyed now in the war (the shield itself is the implement of its destruction), yet the war grew out of of another disorder: Troy's disruption of the rites of marriage, which is the first thing shown after the constellations. Only a god could have made so serene a model of the world; the world is many things at once, both war and peace, tranquility and confusion, love and hate. The shield is an apt symbol for Achilles to bear for he is now out of the ordinary life of men. Marriages and harvests will go on, but not for Achilles. His own death is near, and he is dedicated to the death of one man and the mourning of another, he has become an almost abstract design of pure fate, to flash like a meteor, and then go out.

Thetis brings Achilles his new armour. He calls an assembly (compare book 1) and renounces his anger. Agamemnon is nervous, finds it difficult to address Achilles directly, blames it all on 'ate' but finally admits he was wrong. The compensation is handed over. Achilles now eager for battle, but Odysseus restrains him, insists on feeding the troops (Read page 359: 'But Achilles....groans of dying men') and on a public and formal reconciliation between Achilles and Agamemnon. Briseis and Achilles lament over Patroclus. Achilles arms for battle, (Read pages 363-4: Among all these...noble foes'; compare with the other three arming scenes in the Iliad). His horse prophesies his death.

Zeus bids assembly of the gods to side with the humans (as their 'sympathies dictate') which they do. Long scene between Achilles and Aeneas - to delay meeting with Hector. Achilles kills Priam's young son, Polydorus, and Hector attacks Achilles, but an image of him replaces the real Hector. Achilles' aristeia begins with much slaughter ('androktasias'); for his frenzy and cruelty Read page 378-9: 'Even as he spoke.....with gore'.
 Note Zeus' Olympian grandstand seat: Read page 366-7; 'Lord of the Earthquake... dogs of war.'

Achilles rages on. He fights two duels. Many of the dead fall into the river Scamander (also known as Xanthus) who takes exception to having his channels blocked up and so attacks Achilles. Full scale fighting, both human and divine. The gods squabble like children amongst themselves ('theomachy') in a caricature of the real human fighting. Trojans flee into the city.

There is terror and light relief in this book. No other Greek fighter is mentioned (as in 20) so it seems like Achilles against the whole Trojan army!

Read pages 382-90: note especially: 382-3 'Thus the highborn... from his bow'. - 'sublime lines' (Willcock); and 386-90: 'When he heard this... beautiful banks'.

Read pages 390-3: 'But now the feud... all her fault'. Glorious tomfoolery; a reminder that 'immortality precludes seriousness...'

Ruthlessness and terror are balanced in this book by frivolity and silliness. The audience apparently willing to accept it - even if it means the gods being made to look stupid.

Hector stands outside Troy - kept there by 'Fate for her own evil purposes' - despite the pleas of his parents. ('have pity on me, your poor father' - Hecuba, likewise pleads for 'pity') Hector is adamant - he fears 'aidos' more. When Achilles encounters Hector, the latter flees round the walls of Troy, with Achilles in hot pursuit. Read pages 401-2 for the realism of the chase; note esp. 'This was no ordinary funeral games' and 'More than once Hector... move a limb'. Zeus' scales are produced, Hector 'loses' and is immediately abandoned by Apollo. Aided by Athene, Achilles kills Hector - why do the gods need to help him? 'It is precisely because he doesn't need her (Athene's) help that he gets it...' (Willcock) - because it enhances his victory and enables the goddess to share in his success. Read pages 405-7; for Hector's death and dying words: 'Achilles saw that..... ships on fire.'

Achilles then proceeds to abuse the corpse - Homer disapproves - and glories in his victory over 'the noble Hector, who was treated like a god in Troy'.

. Inside Troy, there is lamentation for Hector. Pathos of Andromache who envisages what will now happen to her and their son: Read page 410-11: 'And your son isend.'

Here is the climax of the WRATH theme. Note esp. Achilles personal anger in all this

BOOK 23

The games

Greeks lament for Patroclus. Funeral games are held. The games are symbolic of a return to order and more civilised behaviour. Read pages 419-36: the games themselves; note the connection between games and military training. All the national games had legends which attributed their origin to funeral games held to honour a great hero.

BOOK 24

Priam and Achilles

Abuse of Hector's corpse continues. Gods decide that the corpse should be returned to Priam. Priam, helped by the gods, visits Achilles inside the Greek camp and ransoms Hector's body. The poem ends with the funeral of Hector and mourning for him by the three women of Troy.

The loose ends are tied up. The wrath theme (begun in book 1) ends. Achilles' anger is not finally assuaged until he treats Priam gently. It is Priam, ironically, who 'humanises' Achilles again by reminding him of his father. Read page 450-1: 'It is to get him back from you... pattern of our lives.'

The Book is a deliberate anti-climax. The action was over when Hector was killed but it is only now that the theme of ANGER is resolved.

Read page 458: '...but in all the nineteen years...'. The final difficulty of the Iliad!

Note the correspondence between books 1 and 24:

Book 1

- a) rejection of the father (Chryses) who wishes to ransom his daughter.
- b) quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon
- c) Thetis speaks to Achilles and agrees to take a message to Zeus
- d) Thetis and Zeus
- e) dispute among the gods

Book 24

- e) dispute among the gods
- d) Zeus and Thetis
- c) Thetis speaks to Achilles, having brought a message from Zeus
- b) friendly converse between Achilles and Priam
- a) agreement that the father (Priam) may ransom the body of his son.

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