

Selections from the Iliad: A Study Guide

Virgil and the World of the Hero

A place to start...

The module "Virgil and the World of the Hero" requires you to know four books of Iliad by Homer in depth, VI, XVIII, XXII, XIV. You need to focus on the concept of 'The Hero'.

Use this guide to investigate each book and use it as a basis of your revision notes. You need to have worked through the questions and prepared the summaries prior to our seminars on the 3rd and 7th of July. This will also provide you with ideas in preparation for reading 'The Aeneid'.

You are reading the Martin Hammond translation, published by Penguin, which is prose and therefore really accessible. If you want more of a challenge and would like to get more of a feel for the verse of the original, there is a translation by Richmond Lattimore published by University of Chicago, which is in the LRC.

Useful books (some are in the LRC):

Silk, M (1987); Landmarks of World Literature: Homer, The Iliad, Cambridge University Press

Jones, P (2003); Homer's Iliad: A commentary on three translations, Bristol Classical Press

Fowler, R (ed) (2004); Cambridge Companion to Homer, Cambridge University Press

Spark Notes: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/iliad/>

If you want a general introduction, but not the most rigorous, there is a York Notes book!

A very brief introduction

“Sing, goddess, of the anger of Achilleus, son of Peleus, the accursed anger which brought uncounted anguish on the Achaians and hurled down to Hades many mighty souls of heroes, making their bodies the prey to dogs and birds’ feasting: and this was the working of Zeus’ will.”

Trans. Hammond 1987

There is a full summary of the poem at the front of the Penguin edition, READ IT! It will help you place this in a more complete context. But for those of you too lazy to read it:

- Ilium (in the region of Troy) is being besieged by the Greeks/Achaians to get back Helen snatched by a Trojan prince Paris.
- Ten years into this war Achilleus gets very angry with his leader Agamemnon (brother of Helen’s real husband, Menelaus).
- Achilleus leaves the fighting with his Murmidons and the fighting escalates as the Trojans know the Achaians/Greeks best warrior is away.
- Hektor (Prince of Troy) is about to set fire to Greek ships, so Achilles lets his ‘friend’ Patroklos fight.
- Hektor kills Patroklos, Achilleus comes back to take revenge.
- Hektor and Achilleus fight and Hektor is killed.
- The poem ends with Hektor’s burial.
- THIS ALL TAKES PLACE IN FIFTY DAYS!!!

The books you are studying will be a basis for comparison with Aeneas and his actions as a ‘hero’ in Virgil’s Aeneid. Over the summer read the rest of the Iliad and the Aeneid in preparation for September.

Homeric conventions and style

Origins

- The poem is set in the Greek Bronze Age (c1100BC), all the heroes have bronze weapons.
- The stories are based in Mycenaean palaces, the aristocracy probably would only have wanted to hear about the heroes like themselves (think about the herald's speech in the Agamemnon and it being unusual because he is a regular soldier).
- These would have been handed down orally and finally written down when the Greeks probably invented their form of writing about the time that Homer was composing (750-700BC).

Conventions and style

As it is a cross between an oral poem and one written down it has some conventions and styles belonging to both

- Each line fits a nice rhythm making it easier to remember based around syllable length, these are HEXAMETERS (compare with Shakespeare's Iambic Pentameter).
- In order to fit the line characters gain 'epithets' to fit – such as 'godlike Achilles' or 'swift footed Achilles' – you'll see these often!
- There are lots of repeated patterns – e.g. hand-to-hand battle scenes follow a set sequence of events, and Homer fleshes them out with lots of details
- Ring-composition forms the epic as a whole – intro, digression, return to point of intro – BUT it has lots of tiny rings within it as well for example ring-composition is used in lots of speeches (look at Glaukos' speech in Book VI)
- SIMILES (7% of whole epic), especially at moments of high drama or emotion – designed to generate PATHOS.

The Heroic Code

The heroes in the Iliad and their actions are linked to these ideas. When you are reading the set books keep these ideas in your mind, it is important not to stray too far from Homeric Ideals, and think like a 21st Century person!

Kleos (κλεος): 'Glory' earned through battle, eternal glory: immortality. It's important that future generations know a hero's name and that his sons will fare better than him.

Timé (τιμη): 'Honour' the good opinion of other men as a result of the hero's achievements.

Menos (μενος): 'Might' this is a surge of fierceness they feel on the battlefield, it's also used for wild animals such as lions.

Thumos (θυμος): The enthusiasm for fighting/battle.

Charma (χαρμα): Not to be confused with Karma! This is the word used by Homer to express joy on the battlefield.

Aidos (αιδος): 'Shame', heroes feel a strong sense of shame and fear of disgrace, they have a strong sense of what other people might think of their actions. It is also linked to respect for the gods/friends/enemies.

Geras (γερας): 'Prize', it is important that heroes receive a war-prize for success in battle.

Book VI: Hektor in Troy

This book is centred around **kleos** and **xenia** (both within the family and guest-friendship), when you are reading keep this in mind, btw the more heroic you are, the more likely you are to choose glory over family!

NB In this book Paris and Alexandros are used interchangeably – they are still both Paris!

Read the book and then summarise the events into six main episodes.

Answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think that the book is entitled “Hektor in Troy” by the translator, Martin Hammond?
2. What are the differences between the characters of Agamemnon and Menelaus?
3. How does Helen treat Paris and Hektor differently? What does this suggest about her opinions towards them both?
4. In which ways are the gods honoured in Book VI?
5. Why do you think Athene declines the prayers of the women?
6. Why is the story of Bellerophon important? What effect does it have on the relationship between Diomedes and Glaukos?
7. What impression do you get of the family relationship between Hektor and Andromache?
8. Why is Astyanax important for creating pathos in the book?
9. What affect has Achilles had on Andromache’s life prior to this war?
10. How are the characters of Hektor and Paris contrasted?
11. What is the overall picture of Hektor created in this book?
12. How far do you agree with Peter Jones’ statement “No man is an island in Homer” based on this book?

Collect quotations on the following themes:

- Kleos
- Men and Women
- Family relationships
- Xenia
- The role of the gods

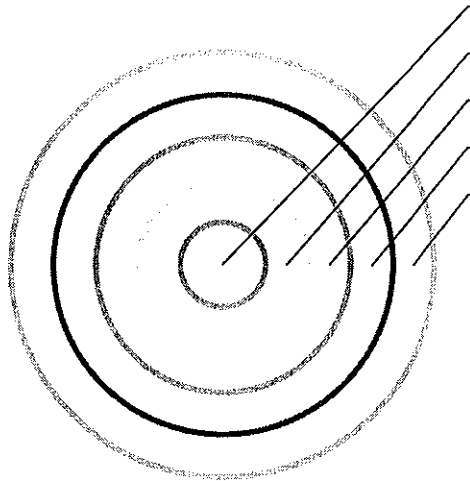
Book XVIII: Thetis, Achilles and New Armour

This book is the turning point of the Iliad (remember 'peripetia' from tragedy?). Achilles is now no longer angry with the Achaians, and instead turns his wrath on the Trojans and Hektor. His desire for **kleos** is not in the form of a war-prize (**geras**) as it was in Book I, but for revenge for Patroklos' death.

Read the book and summarise it into six main episodes.

Answer the following questions:

1. What does Achilles' reaction to the news of Patroklos' death reveal about their relationship?
2. How does Homer develop the relationship between Thetis and Achilles? What is the effect on the listener of Achilles turning to his mother, who is divine?
3. Compare the portrayal of Hektor in this book with that of Book VI, what different elements of his heroism are present?
4. How important are the gods in this book? What are the effects of their actions?
5. Why do you think the Trojans follow Hektor's plan and not Poulydamas'?
6. Why is it important for the Achaians to carry out funeral rites with Patroklos' body?
7. How are the gods also dependent on the laws of **xenia** (especially in relation to the armour)?
8. 'The shield of Achilles' is a famous example of **ekphrasis**, copy the diagram below into your books and complete the rings from the description in the book.



Collect quotations on the following themes:

- Kleos
- Family relationships
- Xenia
- The role of the gods
- Fate

Book XX: The Death of Hektor

This book is the culmination of the revenge of Achilles begun in Book XVIII. Homer looks not only at the action of the fight between Achilles and Hektor, but also the repercussions on Hektor's family.

Read the book and summarise it into six main episodes.

Answer the following questions:

1. What tone do you think the speech by Apollo at the beginning of the book takes? What does Achilles' response tell us about his attitude towards the gods?
2. How is Priam presented in his speech towards the beginning of the book, what does this show about the situation for the Trojans?
3. Why does Hektor choose to fight?
4. Why do you think that Homer uses so many simile's in this book, what do they serve to represent and what effect do they have?
5. Why do you think that Athene chooses to impersonate Deiphobos? What do you think the outcome of the battle would have been if she hadn't intervened?
6. Whose armour is Hektor actually wearing? What does this show you about the process of gaining a **geras**?
7. How does Achilles deny Hektor his longed for **kleos**?
8. Compare the three laments of Priam, Hekuba and Andromache, what do they have in common and how do they compare with what these characters have already said about Hektor in this book and in Book VI?

Collect quotations on the following themes:

- Kleos
- Family relationships
- Xenia
- The role of the gods
- Fate
- Death and mourning

Book XXIV: Achilles and Priam

This is the final book of the Iliad, in which all the themes and ideas are drawn together. It marks a huge 'ring composition' with events of Book I being mirrored here, and Achilles' wrath is finally satiated through more gifts and the intervention of the gods.

Read the books and summarise the book into nine main episodes.

Answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think the gods think that Achilles is going too far with the treatment of Hektor? Do you agree with the reasons that they give at the beginning of the book?
2. Which actions of Hektor have prompted Zeus to intervene with his body? What does this show about the relationship between mortals and immortals?
3. What are the differences between Achilles' and Hektor's family's mourning?
4. How does Priam's rant at his sons mirror Hektor's attitude to Paris in Book VI? What does this show about Trojan attitudes towards heroism?
5. Why do you think Hermes accompanies Priam and why do you think he lies about who he is?
6. How does Priam appeal to Achilles? Why would his speech have particular significance to an ancient Greek – think about **supplication**?
7. How does Achilles restore **kleos** to Hektor after Priam presents him with the ransom?
8. What part does **xenia** play in the meeting between Achilles and Priam?
9. How far does Hektor embody the code of the hero based on the three lamentations upon his body's return?
10. "Such was the burial they gave to Hektor, tamer of horses." Was that the final line you were expecting?

Collect quotations on the following themes:

- Kleos
- Family relationships
- Xenia
- The role of the gods
- Fate
- Death and mourning

Conclusions

Based on these four books think about;

- the similarities and differences between Achilleus and Hektor.
- how would you define an Homeric hero.
- how the part the gods play in the poem affects the actions of the mortals.
- how necessary the heroic code is for the story to develop.
- how Homer develops characters and plot.
- how Homer makes us emotionally involved with the action.

AND BE PREPARED TO TALK ABOUT THEM!!!