



# *The Iliad*

## Structure & Themes

by

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# *The Iliad*

- 📖 The *Iliad* recounts the events of a six week period during the ninth year of the Trojan War. Because of Agamemnon's refusal to return Chryseis, the daughter of Apollo's priest, a plague has swept through the Greek Army. When forced to return his captive, Agamemnon vows to take Achilles' prize Breseis.

# The Structure of the Iliad

- ❖ While the *Iliad* recounts several central events in the Trojan war, many are only referred to indirectly. The structure of Homer's epic is multi-layered in a bi-lateral tripartite fashion.
- ❖ Achilles' Wrath
- ❖ The dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles
- ❖ The battle of Achilles and the Trojan hero Hector
- ❖ The exploits of the Greek heroes Diomedes, Patroclus, and Achilles



## *In medias res*

- ✦ Like the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad* begins in the middle of the story. Information about all of the events that have occurred in the past nine years are presented in a series of flashbacks.

# The *Iliad*

*Rage -- Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles,  
murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses,  
hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls,  
great fighters' souls, but made their bodies carrion,  
feasts for the dogs and birds,  
and the will of Zeus was moving toward its end,  
Begin, Muse when the two first broke and clashed,  
Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles.*

**Iliad Book 1.1-8.**

*The Iliad* translated by Robert Fagles

# *Transliteration of Proem*

- ✦ *Greek: “Menin aeide thea Peleiadeo Achileos”*
- ✦ *Literal Translation: “Anger sing of, goddess, of Peleus’s son Achilles”*
- ✦ *Fagles: “Rage - Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus; son Achilles”*
- ✦ *Invocation of the Muse*
- ✦ *Human suffering due to transgression of the heroic code*
- ✦ *Main players are introduced*
- ✦ *Will of Zeus – fate -- “moira” - portion of death.*

# *Heroic Code*

✦ Goal of Homeric heroes – to achieve honor - “**arete**”

✦ 3 ways to achieve honor and esteem

✦ Demonstration of courage and physical ability in battle

✦ Hunting and athletics

✦ Giving advice



# *Positive values*

✦ ***Arete* – Esteem**

✦ ***Aristeia* – The Act of Accomplishing *Arete***

✦ ***Kleos* – Glory**

# *Kleos*



*... and the lord of the war cry Diomedes opened up,  
“Who are you, my fine friend? – another born to die?  
I’ve never noticed you on the lines where we win kleos,  
not till now. But here you come, charging out,  
in front of all the rest with such bravado,  
daring to face the flying shadow of my spear.*

**Book 6.141-146**

# Kleos

*I've learned it all too well. To stand up bravely,  
always to fight in the front ranks of Trojan soldiers,  
winning for my father great kleos, kleos for myself.*

**Book 6.526-528**





# The Heroic Code

**Although Achilles and Hector vary in their reasons for fighting, they still share the distinct characteristics that define an epic hero. Both strive to demonstrate their *arête* by fighting each other. There can be no greater reward to a warrior than to fight hand to hand with another noble warrior, “So Hector swooped now, swinging his whetted sword/ and Achilles charged too, bursting with rage, barbaric” (22.368-369). Because of their search for *kleos* and *arête*, both heroes find their destruction in each other.**

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# Negative values

🔦 ***Hubris* – Pride or Arrogance**

🔦 ***Menin* – Wrath or Anger**

🔦 ***Ate* – Madness or Delusion**



# *Aidos*

*And tall Hector nodded, his helmet flashing:  
“All this weighs on my mind too, dear woman.  
But I would die of aidos to face the men of Troy  
and the Trojan women trailing their long robes  
if I were to shrink from battle now, a coward.*

**Book 6.521-525**

# *Menin*

*“The girl – I won’t give up the girl. Long before that,  
old age will overtake her in my house, in Argos,  
far from her fatherland, slaving back and forth,  
at the loom, forced to share my bed!”*

*Now go,  
don’t tempt my menin – and you may depart alive”*

**Book 1.31-36**

# *Menin*

*He broke off and anguish gripped Achilles.*

*The heart in his rugged chest was pounding, torn . . .  
should he draw the long sharp sword slung at his hip,  
thrust through the ranks and kill Agamemnon now? –  
or check his menin and beat his fury down?*

**Book 1.222-226**

# **Ate**

*So, with a deep groan, the king addressed his armies:  
“Friends . . . lords of the Argives, all my captains!  
Cronus’ son has entangled me in ate, blind ruin –  
Book 9.18-20.*

*And Agamemnon the lord of men consented quickly:  
That’s no lie, old man – a full account you give,  
Of all my acts of ate. Ate, blind I was!  
Book 9.136-38*

# Hospitality

- ✦ Because Zeus is the patron of travelers, hospitality is an important religious value that places obligations on both host and guest. Hospitality is more than just “good manners. It is an important theme that runs throughout the stories in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Things often turn out badly for guests or hosts who act improperly.

# *Xenos*

*. . . and with winning words, he called out to Glaucus,  
the young captain, “Splendid – you are my xenos,  
from the days of our grandfathers long ago!*

*Noble Oeneus hosted your brave Bellerophon once,  
He held him there in his halls, twenty whole days,  
and the gave each other handsome xenia.*

*My kinsmen offered a gleaming sword-belt, rich red,  
Bellerophon gave a cup, two handled, solid gold --*

*Iliad Book 6.257-264*

# Xenos

*. . . It would be most improper,  
If we were cold to guests of Telemakhos -  
No matter what tramp turns up. Well look here -  
Let me throw in my own small xenia . . .  
. . . His hand went backward,  
And fishing out a cow's foot from the basket,  
He let it fly.*

*Odysseus rolled his head  
To one side softly, ducking the blow, and smiled*

*Odyssey 20.303-310*