The Iliad – Summary and Commentary – Lombardo’s *Essential Iliad*

Reading Assignments for Homer’s *Iliad*  
(Draft 6.27.15)

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**Summary:** The Iliad begins with the poet calling on the Muse to sing of the wrath of Achilles and its consequences. Apollo's priest Chryses comes to the Achaean camp and asks to ransom back his daughter Chryseis, who has been captured. Agamemnon rudely sends him away, and Chryses prays to Apollo to punish the Greeks, which Apollo does by sending a plague upon them. Achilles calls an assembly to ask the seer Calchas why Apollo is angry. First Calchas secures Achilles' promise that he will protect him from reprisals, then he explains the situation. Agamemnon harshly denounces Calchas. Agamemnon agrees to give up Chryseis, who is his concubine, but demands some other "prize" to replace her. Achilles answers that another prize will come later, when Troy is sacked. Agamemnon angrily threatens to take the captive woman of Achilles or of another of the Achaean chiefs, and Achilles responds to this slight by denouncing Agamemnon and threatening to go home to Phthia. Agamemnon repeats his threat to take Achilles' prize, and Achilles is about to draw his sword when Athena appears to him and stops him. Instead of attacking Agamemnon, Achilles berates him some more, and swears an oath to stay out of the battle so that the Achaaeans can see how important he is. Nestor tries to reconcile the two chiefs, but without much success. --

**Commentary:**

1.1  "Rage" – *menis* in Greek – the central element in Achilles’ character, and the driver of the action in the epic. Homer will explore the causes and consequences – for Achilles himself, and for countless Greeks and Trojans. [Consider what causes anger in our own lives – and what impact our anger can have]

1.8  "godlike Achilles" – Achilles is the son of a mortal father, Peleus, and a divine mother, Thetis – he is indeed like the gods in his exceptional talent as a warrior, but ultimately he is mortal. [Consider throughout our study of Greece how gods and humans are similar and different – how does mortality affect the human condition? Is mortality a blessing or a curse?]

1.9-19  Apollo inspires the feud between Achilles and Agamemnon. Agamemnon had disrespected Apollo’s priest, and Achilles, always sensitive to matters of honor, objects. – [But note that the Greeks had engaged in simple piracy, including the seizure of women to serve as concubines – this is the first of many instances where women are treated primarily as objects. And note too that Chryses, Apollo’s priest, is willing to pay a great ransom to get his daughter back.]

1.30-31  The Greek troops really want Agamemnon to take the ransom – they are second-guessing their commander

1.38-39  Agamemnon admits openly that he wants Chryseis as a concubine – she will have to come to his bed – [Note that the daughter’s name is only a variant of her father’s name – we’ll see this among the Romans too – women in many ancient cultures had identities totally dependent on the men in their lives]

1.45-51  Note that Chryses demonstrates his devotion to Apollo by building a temple and making animal sacrifices – and Apollo will respond by shooting “arrows” of plague at the Greeks

Achilles takes the lead in responding to the crisis of the plague, usurping responsibility from Agamemnon – Achilles is a natural leader, though Agamemnon has the official power. But note as well that Hera has “planted the thought in him” – [Be on the lookout for instances where human and divine motivations either reinforce each other, or are in conflict – here they are in unison]

Achilles raises the idea of simply giving up the war and sailing home, an attractive notion for an army that has spent ten years in indecisive fighting – But note also that he calls on a prophet who can explain Apollo’s anger – and note that he too is willing to appease the gods through sacrifices.

Achilles pledges to protect Calchas against Agamemnon, who “boasts” that he is the best of the Achaeans (i.e.- Greeks) – another sign of Achilles challenging Agamemnon’s preeminence – Achilles will soon assert his own status as the “best of the Achaeans”

Agamemnon responds in anger to Calchas – but Achilles has set up this open challenge to his authority.

Agamemnon declares that he likes Chryseis in his bed even better than his own wife, Clytemnestra – Homer’s audience would know the story that Clytemnestra and her lover murdered Agamemnon when he finally returned from Troy after the war – and they would know that Agamemnon had sacrificed his own daughter, Iphigenia, before the war in order to get favorable winds for the voyage to Troy – [Are we supposed to feel any sympathy for this guy??]

Agamemnon will give Chryseis back – but he demands another prize in her place – “it wouldn’t be right” for him as king to be the only one without a prize – Again, note the objectification of women and the focus on honor through prizes

Achilles openly challenges Agamemnon again, blasting him as a “greedy glory-hound”

Agamemnon agrees to send Chryseis back to Chryses, with an additional sacrifice of 100 bulls – in the wake of the plague he is now givng gifts rather than accepting ransom – he has yielded on this significant point – BUT he asserts his power and right to seize someone else’s prize, even Achilles – his focus has shifted to his standing among his men.

Achilles’ challenge to Agamemnon’s authority escalates – “You sorry, profiteering excuse for a commander”

Achilles has no quarrel with the Trojans – this is not a war of his choosing – as most wars are not fought for the concerns of the common soldiers who bear the brunt of battle – Instead this war is for the “pleasure” of “dogface” Agamemnon and the “honor” of his brother Menelaus (whose wife Helen is now married to the Trojan prince Paris – and whether she went by choice or by force or by the will of the gods is an open question among the embittered troops) – [Caroline Alexander, author of The War That Killed Achilles, finds echoes of Achilles’ argument in Muhammed Ali’s famous statement about Vietnam: “I ain’t got no quarrel with no Viet Cong. No Viet Cong ever called me ‘nigger.’”]

1.170-181 Achilles in his rage complains that Agamemnon gets the prizes while Achilles does all the dirty work in battle – so he plays his trump card and declares that he will simply go home from the war.

1.183-197 Agamemnon dares Achilles to desert, declaring that he does not need his help anyway – [that Agamemnon is very, very wrong about this will soon become clear throughout the epic] – Agamemnon then follows through on his threat and pledges to seize Achilles’ “prize” Briseis in recompense for Chryseis – Agamemnon is full of spite and wants to demonstrate his power over Achilles.

1.198-201 Achilles is ready to kill Agamemnon right then and there – but he is struggling to control his rage – [Where do our sympathies lie right now? Should he do it? Or would Achilles just be taking his treasonous insubordination to the extreme?] – [Note that we will encounter similar questions about responses to unjust power later in the course: Antigone and Creon, Socrates and Meletus, Brutus and Tarquin, Brutus and Caesar, conspirators and Nero – this is an important recurring theme] – [And what about in our own lives? How should we react when we perceive injustice or disrespect? Is it ever right to challenge authority in the manner of Achilles?]

1.205-206 Athena intervenes for the first time, sent by Hera – [Is she redirecting Achilles from the course he would take on his own? Or do the gods simply incline us toward the actions where are own nature would lead us anyway? How independent are we really??]

1.215 Achilles declares his intent to kill, indicating his instinctive desire.

1.217-224 Athena succeeds in checking his temper, urging him to “tell off” Agamemnon instead – if Achilles is patient, the gods will ensure that he will get “three times as many magnificent gifts” in the end – [BUT what will these “gifts” be? We will see that ultimately Achilles will get even more honor from his fellow Greeks as well as immortal fame – he will die a mortal’s death, but his glory will live on after him]

1.236-246 Achilles tells him off indeed! – “bloated drunk, with a dog’s eyes and a rabbit’s heart” – Achilles calls him out for cowardice and greed – he even questions the manhood of the troops who have let Agamemnon misrule them for so long.

1.247-259 Achilles makes his own pledge to withdraw from the fight and allow the Trojan hero Hector to devastate the Greeks – all because Agamemnon refused to “honor the best Greek of all” – he even goes on to slam the scepter to the ground, emphasizing his scorn for the standard symbols of authority.

1.263-268 This has been quite a scene in the assembly, and the elder statesman Nestor tries in vain to bring both men back to their senses.

1.269-299 Nestor observes that only the Trojans can benefit from such dissension among the Greeks – Nestor urges them to take the advice of a man who has seen the real heroes from back in the day – he advises Agamemnon to leave Briseis with Achilles – and he cautions Achilles against “locking horns” with a king – even though Achilles is a better man and the son of a goddess, Zeus has chosen to give power to Agamemnon – Achilles must check his anger –

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
[Nestor is defending the established order – he cautiously respects the king, even when acting unjustly]

1.301-306 Agamemnon endorses Nestor’s speech, and then complains about Achilles’ “insolence” – Note that Agamemnon does not address the question of right or wrong in his own actions, only that Achilles is acting out of place in challenging his authority

1.308-317 Achilles cannot let it go – he refuses to accept the shame that would go along with bowing and scraping in obedience to an unjust king – [he cares very much about how others view him] – he then declares that he will willingly give up Briseis – but he threatens violent death of Agamemnon dares to take anything else from him” – Agamemnon’s “black blood” will “boil” around Achilles' spear if he crosses that line

Whew. How did it come to this? Who’s right? Who’s wrong? Are they both petty and petulant? Or do they both have good arguments on their side? What is really at stake in this feud? And who will suffer as a result?

Have we experienced quarrels in our own lives that echo this argument in any way? What provokes own rage? And can we ever control it? Do we admire either man for sticking my his principles? Or do we reject their examples as selfish and destructive?
Assignment #2  Book 1: 318-643  pages 10-19

Summary: Achilles agrees to surrender his captive woman, Briseis, without a fight. When the messengers from Agamemnon arrive, Achilles hands her over. He then meets with his mother, Thetis the sea-nymph, and tells her the whole story of how he has been dishonored. He asks her to convince Zeus to make the Trojans win for a while, so the Greeks will realize how much they need Achilles. Thetis leaves, and the Achaeans set about returning Chryseis to her home and propitiating Apollo. Thetis meets with Zeus and explains the situation; he owes her a favor, so he agrees to give glory to the Trojans on Achilles' behalf. Hera, who favors the Greeks, expresses her displeasure over this plan, but Zeus asserts his authority and she is silenced. Hephaestus comforts his mother Hera, and soon all the gods are again at peace, and the day ends.

Commentary:

1.331-338  “Spiteful” Agamemnon follows through on this threat to seize Briseis from Achilles – after he has sent Odysseus to Chryses and Apollo with sacrifices

1.346-356  Achilles is surprisingly agreeable with the heralds from Agamemnon – but he reissues his warning that many Greeks may be “hacked to bits” because of Agamemnon’s decision – [Both men are setting up the pieces for a “blame game” – Note that Briseis goes “unwillingly” even though she really is just a pawn in this power struggle – she appears to have developed some affection or respect for Achilles]

1.367-370  A KEY passage – Achilles explains the terms of his special status as a demi-god – Zeus was supposed to grant him “honor” in compensation for his “short life” – Yet now, without his prize, he has neither his honor nor a long life ahead – He sure is feeling sorry himself, or at least betrayed

1.379-433  Achilles lets loose as his mother, Thetis, tries to console him. Much of this speech is a recap of the action we have seen so far (and Achilles acknowledges that Thetis “already knows” the story), but the new element is his urging Thetis to “call in” a debt from Zeus (410) – Thetis had earlier aided Zeus in stifling a rebellion by other gods

1.426-431  The climax of Achilles’ request: He wants Zeus to aid the Trojans in killing Greeks so that the survivors will “appreciate” him. [How do we feel about Achilles’ honor relative to the lives of others he is willing to sacrifice? Why does he not wish for Agamemnon alone to suffer? Is Achilles now any different than Agamemnon, who earlier had caused the deaths of many Greeks because he was unwilling to give Chryseis back to her father? Is he a hypocrite in this core wish?]

1.434-441  Thetis agrees with her son’s complaint and enables his plan for revenge – she does not want him to suffer both “an early death and misery beyond compare”

1.478-483  Chryseis prays to Apollo to lift the plague because Odysseus has returned his daughter and brought 100 bulls for sacrifice

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
1.486-505  [An interesting account of how sacrifices worked – in effect they were huge feasts and parties, with the gods getting the bones and fat, and the mortals getting the food and wine – Not so much of a “sacrifice” from our perspective – more like an excuse for a party!]

1.521-532  Thetis follows through on her pledge after Zeus and the other gods return from their own feasting with the Ethiopians

1.545-548  Thetis has to beg Zeus a second time, because the first tie he just sat in silence, mulling it over

1.549-559  Zeus explains that he fears Hera’s reaction to any harm for the Greeks, especially as the request comes from a former lover. He says he will do it – his “nod” signifies his irreversible decision – but he still advises Thetis to slip out undetected if she can

1.565-569  The other gods show Zeus the proper respect – they make sure to stand when he enters the room

1.573-576  Zeus was right to fear Hera’s reaction – she has in fact noticed Zeus scheming with Thetis

1.578-600  The sniping between husband and wife escalates, with Hera voicing suspicions but Zeus ultimately shutting her down with threats of violence – [This is hardly a loving relationship! What does this tell us about the Greek conception of the gods? Are they like humans in their shortcomings?]

1.606-616  Hera’s son Hephaestus tries to console his mother, recognizing that this quarrel could take the pleasure out of their feast – [We see here a parallel between human quarrels and divine, but notice the difference in the stakes – for the gods, a dinner might get ruined, but for mortals many may die. And consider whether it is the high stakes for mortals that makes life worth living – the gods have little at stake, and therefore resort, sometimes very callously, to making mortals their playthings, ready to be honored or destroyed at their whim]

1.618-626  Hephaestus continues with a story about how Zeus had once manhandled him, flipping him out of Olympus and tossing him down to earth

1.627-632  Hephaestus has succeeded in cheering up his mother, but the sight of the “lame god turned serving boy” just leads the others to laugh at him derisively – [The gods are quick to mock anyone who is not perfect in form [as we will soon see the mortal Greeks do too – Thersites and Odysseus in Book 2]

1.641-644  Despite their spat, Zeus and Hera wind up happily in bed with each other at the end of the evening
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**Assignment #3**

**Book 2**: pages 20-23

**Book 3**: pages 28-35

**Book 2 Summary**: Zeus sends Agamemnon a deceitful dream indicating that this is a good time for the Achaeans to attack. -- [Next morning, Agamemnon summons the chiefs to an assembly and tells them about the dream. Nestor approves, and the chiefs call an assembly of the whole army. Agamemnon takes the scepter and addresses the multitude, telling them that the time has come to give up the struggle (now in its ninth year) and go home. The Achaeans are delighted by this and rush for the ships, but Hera sends Athena to intervene. On Athena’s orders, Odysseus goes around stopping the flight. To noble men he recalls their duty as leaders, and to common soldiers he asserts the authority of the kings, backed by a blow from the staff.] -- When the army is reassembled, a funny-looking commoner named Thersites rises to address the crowd. He rails against Agamemnon, calling him greedy and implying that he is in the wrong in the quarrel with Achilles. Odysseus rises and shouts Thersites down, chiefly on the grounds that a common soldier such as he ought not to defy his betters. The crowd delights in seeing Odysseus humiliate Thersites.

**Commentary:**

2.3-11  
Zeus thinks about how best to honor Achilles and harm the Greeks and decides to send a “Dream” to mislead Agamemnon – [Consider our understanding of dreams – do they come from within us, or are they sent from without? Or is it really a combination of both? Does Agamemnon’s own pride and arrogance mislead him?]

2.42-43  
Agamemnon is a “fool” for thinking he could defeat Troy – he could not know Zeus’ real mind

2.55-225  
[These lines are omitted, but note the curious nature of Agamemnon’s plan: he wants to test his men’s loyalty by suggesting that they sail home – and that’s just what they want to do! It takes Odysseus to intervene and keep the soldiers in line]

2.231-244  
Thersites is the “rabble rouser” who still persists in mocking Agamemnon and urging the men to go home even after Odysseus has convinced most of them otherwise. He mocks the nobles to stir up the crowd, and both Achilles and Odysseus “hate” him – even though he is in fact fact-supporting most of Achilles’ argument about the war. But Homer notes that Thersites is the “ugliest” of the Greeks, and therefore unworthy of a sympathetic hearing. [The class bias is striking here – the nobles are both wise and beautiful – the common man is ugly and foolish – How much do we associate appearance with other qualities in our society today?]

2.245-261  
Thersites’ speech focuses on the greed of Agamemnon, for both riches and women – but his most powerful point is that “It’s not right for a leader to march our troops into trouble” – [Do you agree? Or must leaders sometimes judge when the trouble is worth it?]

2.266-285  
Odysseus very harshly puts Thersites in his place, dismissing him as “trash” with no right to question his betters, let alone a king – he even threatens to “strip his ass naked” and give him a beating if he persists in his insolence – [How would we respond if anyone spoke like

Odysseus at Asheville School? Could a teacher speak this way about a student who questioned something Mr. Montgomery did?

2.286-301 Notice the troops’ reaction: they laugh heartily when Odysseus smacks Thersites – they see that as great leadership on Odysseus’ part – [Again, what do we think of this reaction? Would we laugh along with the rest of the troops?]

Assignment #3 cont’d Book 3: 1-261 pages 28-35

Book 3 Summary: The two armies come together. Paris sees Menelaus and shrinks back into the ranks in fear, earning a bitter reproach from Hector. Chastised, Paris proposes a single combat between himself and Menelaus. Hector is pleased and conveys this proposal to the Greeks, whereupon Menelaus quickly accepts the challenge. While the two sides prepare to seal the bargain with sacrifices, the scene shifts to Helen, whom we find in her chamber weaving a tapestry depicting the Trojan War. Iris summons Helen to the wall, and as Helen goes by the Trojan elders marvel at her beauty. Together Helen and Priam look out over the armies, and Helen identifies various heroes among the Achaean ranks: first Agamemnon, then Odysseus, then Telamonic Ajax. One of the Trojan elders, Antenor, recalls being impressed by the oratorical skill of Odysseus on a previous occasion.

Commentary:

3.22-44 Paris steps forward in order to fight with the best of the Greeks in single combat – he has been shamed into doing so – [Note the comparison of Menelaus with a lion, eager for a slaughter – he is eager to get his revenge – and note too that Paris’ blood “turned milky: when he saw Menelaus accepting the challenge]

3.45-62 Hector is brutal in mocking his younger brother’s cowardice – he dismisses him as a mere “pretty boy,” “nothing but trouble” and “a joke”

3.64-79 Paris accepts the brunt of Hector’s argument but answers notable: “We don’t get to choose what the gods give us, you know, / And we can’t just toss their gifts aside” – he then proposes that he fight Menelaus “winner take all”

3.80-112 Hector likes what he hears and goes to Agamemnon and Menelaus, who are eager to accept

3.113-115 Both the Greek and Trojan troops like the proposal, for the “wretched war” would soon be over – [Note that the common soldiers have suffered for ten years in a fight that really should have concerned Paris and Menelaus in the first place]

3.123-141 The goddess Iris goes to Helen in disguise to tell her that her former and current husbands will soon fight for her

3.142-144 Helen feels a “sweet mist of desire / for her former husband, her parents, and her city” – [Note that “Helen of Troy” remains in this instance “Helen of Sparta”]

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
3.150-168 A council of Spartan elders comments on Helen’s beauty but concludes that “Whatever she is, let her go back with the ships / And spare us and our children a generation of pain”

3.170-177 Priam very generously reassures Helen that “You are not to blame / For this war with the Greeks. The gods are.” – He then asks Helen to tell him about the Greek warriors they see

3.189-190 Agamemnon is “A great king and a warrior both” – though Helen quickly calls herself a “shameless bitch” in observing that Agamemnon was once her brother-in-law – [Helen consistently is hard on herself, often calling herself a “bitch” – Why does she do this? – Do we agree that she is to blame? Is she really at fault for inciting this war? Or is her fate determined by the gods, beyond her control?]

3.214-217 Odysseus is “the master strategist” – “He knows / Every trick there is, and his mind runs deep” – [Keep this in mind when we read The Odyssey – and note that Odysseus’ strategy ultimately will bring Greek success in the war through the ruse of the “Trojan Horse”]

3.235-240 Antenor confirms Helen’s judgment of Odysseus, and observes that when he spoke once in the great hall, he look like a “lout” until he opened his mouth and “The words fell down like snowflakes in a blizzard”

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
**Book 3 Summary:** Priam and Antenor go out onto the battlefield to preside over the oaths under which Menelaus and Paris are to fight in single combat. The single combat is intended to end the war, and the winner is to have Helen. Paris draws the lot granting him first cast, but his spear does not pierce Menelaus' shield. Menelaus throws, but merely grazes Paris. Although Menelaus closes in to kill Paris with his sword, Aphrodite wraps Paris in a cloud and spirits him off the battlefield. Aphrodite goes to Helen and summons her to join Paris in the bedroom. At first Helen protests, but she cannot defy the goddess. Similarly, when confronting Paris in person she begins by reviling him and suggesting that he is a coward, but ends up in bed with him.

**Commentary:**

3.262-317  Agamemnon prepares a sacrifice with Priam as a witness and pledges that the two armies will accept the outcome of the single combat

3.318-324  Agamemnon prays that Zeus should punish anyone who does not respect the truce and the outcome of the fight between Paris and Menelaus – “But Zeus would not fulfill their prayers” – [Note that the gods often respect the prayer of a suppliant, but in this instance Zeus has already decided that the results must be different]

3.370-405  Paris throws the first spear in the battle and misses – Menelaus' spear pierces Paris’ shield and penetrates the breastplate – but does not go all the way through – Menelaus then brings his sword down on Paris’ helmet, “but the blade shattered / Into three or four pieces and fell from his hands” – At this point Menelaus knows that the gods have rigged the outcome of the battle – Aphrodite then even snaps the chinstrap when Menelaus is dragging Paris back to the Greeks – [Note this MAJOR intervention on the part of Aphrodite – she continues to protect Paris because he picked her as the most beautiful of the goddesses]

3.406-409  Aphrodite saves Paris “enveloping him in mist” and returning him to the safety of his bedroom with Helen – [What do we think of this? Is this fair in any way? How must Menelaus feel? And what about the soldiers on both sides who now must resume fighting and dying in this war?]

3.427-440  Helen is furious with Aphrodite for saving Paris like this – she sees through Aphrodite’s disguise and blasts her in a way that mortals rarely address the gods – She wants nothing of Paris herself, declaring “It would be treason / To share his bed”

3.441-445  Aphrodite blasts Helen right back – she may hate the “bitch” as “extravagantly” as she loves her now – and make her “repulsive to both sides” – [Wow – it doesn’t pay to mouth off to a goddess! But does Helen have a good point nonetheless?]

3.456-463  Helen lost her argument to Aphrodite, but she redirects her anger into mocking Paris as a lesser man than Menelaus – [Ouch!]

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3.465-474  Paris once again accepts insults, just as he has done with Hector – But now he says that Menelaus only had the edge in the fight because of help from Athena – he the gods will help the Trojans win next time – And then” “Let’s go to be now and make love / I’ve never wanted you so much” – [And Helen goes with him! It sure helps to have Aphrodite on his side!]

3.478-480  But Paris is hardly a hero to the Trojan troops: “To a man / They hated Paris as they hated death itself”

[What do we think of Helen after this scene? Is she the “bitch” she calls herself multiple times? And what about Paris? Does he deserve any respect at all? Is he just the pretty boy coward that both Hector and Helen call him? Or is he right that “We don’t get to choose the gifts the gods give us”? Is he at fault for making the most of the gifts that Aphrodite has given him? Should we fault anyone for their good fortune??]

Assignment #4 cont’d  Book 6: 328-558  pages 49-56

Book 6 Summary: Hector goes to Paris’ house, where he chastises his brother for not being on the battlefield. Helen tries to get Hector to sit down next to her, but he refuses. Hector goes to his own house to find his wife Andromache, but learns that she is up on the wall with his baby son Astyanax. There he meets them. Weeping, Andromache reminds him of her life story. Achilles killed her whole family, and Hector is all she has. She advises him not to go back out onto the battlefield. Hector replies that he must go or be thought a coward. He imagines Andromache as a captive woman, and is sorrowed by the thought. He seems certain that he will die soon, but he can see no real alternative except to fight on. Next he tries to hold his son, but the baby is frightened by his war gear. Hector removes his helmet and places it on the ground, and the baby comes into his arms. Hector prays that one day his son may be a warrior even more glorious than his father. In his parting words to Andromache, Hector takes pity on her and suggests that perhaps he may survive the battle after all. Hector and Paris return to the battlefield.

Commentary:

6.341-359  Hector again looks to shame Paris by calling him an “idiot” who just nurses his anger – And Paris again takes the criticism, but says he only wanted “to recover from my pain” – he will soon “catch up” after he puts on his armor – “To which Hector said nothing” – [More excuses from Paris?]

6.360-376  Helen jumps in, again calling herself a “bitch” – She wishes the gods had swept her away sooner – or that she could have been the wife “of a better man / One sensitive at least to repeated reproaches” – Helen concludes that ““Zeus has placed this evil fate on us so that / In time to come poets will sing of us” – [Helen shows no respect for her husband – Should she do more to defend him? Or is she right to show more respect both for Menelaus and Hector?]

6.376-387  Hector is not persuaded to sit with Helen – he just wants her to get Paris moving!

6.411-417  Hector encounters his wife Andromache as he is passing through the Western Gate – she is “beautiful” and “gracious” – she is with their Astyanax and the nurse

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
6.418-424 Astyanax is the “beloved son, beautiful as starlight” – Hector smiles in silence – [Note that Achilles smiles only once in the epic, in Book 23, in a part we don’t read – Homer portrays Hector more fully and more humanely with these scenes]

6.427-461 Helen appeals to Hector to save her and Astyanax from an awful fate – she laments that he is “possessed” and his courage is going to kill him – [Achilles had earlier killed her father, yet showed respect to his corpse - unlike what he will do to Hector’s corpse] – Achilles also killed her seven brothers – Hector is all Andromache has left – he must not make her a widow and Astyanax an orphan, but rather stay an defend the city

6.463-490 Hector shares her worries – but he must avoid the “shame” of hanging back from battle “like a coward” – [In his own way, Hector cares as much about the perception of others as does Achilles – though Achilles’ concern for honor leads him to withdraw from battle, while Hector’s fear of shame leads him into battle] – Hector knows that Troy will fall and he feels the pain – But he will feel even more pain if he lives to see Andromache carried away as a slave – so he would rather die first – [This is a curious speech – Why doesn’t he try to save Andromache from that fate? The prediction of his own death and his wife’s enslavement would hardly seem to cheer her up!]

6.491-500 A famous scene, as Astyanax cries in fear at the sight of his father’s “brozen-encased face” and the plume on Hector’s helmet – Both Hector and Andromache laugh, and Hector takes off the helmet, lifts up his son and offers a prayer to Zeus – [This is another key element in humanizing the Trojans]

6.501-506 Hector prays that Astyanax will someday be known as a better man than his father, returning from war with spoils “having killed his man” – [Can we imagine any of the Greek heroes wishing that their sons surpass them? Or are they too caught up in their own sense of honor? And note too that “his mother may rejoice” if Astyanax comes back from battle having killed his enemy]

6.511-518 Hector continues and consoles Andromache more compassionately this time – “No one is going to send me to Hades before my time / And no man has ever escaped his fate, rich or poor / Coward or hero, once born into this world” – [Hector accepts the limits of the human condition, but would rather meet his destiny as a hero rather than a coward] – He then sends Andromache off to women’s work on the loom – “War is the work of men / Of all the Trojan men, and mine especially” – [How do we feel about Hector in this scene? Brave? Compassionate? Sexist? Callous?]

6.525-528 Andromache and the other women of the household begin their mourning for Hector, for they fear he will never return from battle

6.533-538 Paris finally arms for battle, but he is compared to a horse, “a glorious animal” with “mane streaming,” “sure of his splendor” – [Is this a positive description? Or yet another jab at the softness of Paris?]

6.549-554 Hector confesses that he does not understand his brother, who could be courageous enough, but “slack off” – and Hector hears the troops blame Paris for all “this trouble” – [The war had its origins in “The Judgment of Paris” – but time and again we see judgments of Paris – and he does not come across favorably]

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Assignment #5  Book 9: 186-443, 642-737  pages 56-63, 68-71
           Book 16: 1-107   pages 79-82

Book 9 Summary: The assembly selects three ambassadors (Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax) and sends them to Achilles. They find him playing the lyre and singing epic verses by the shore. They feast, and then Odysseus makes the first of the speeches imploring Achilles to return. First he apprises Achilles of the strategic situation, using the rhetorical device of hyperbole to magnify the danger in which the Achaeans find themselves. Second, he touches Achilles’ heart by speaking in the voice of his father Peleus, sending him off to Troy and warning him to avoid quarrels. Third, he repeats Agamemnon’s list of gifts and honors, artfully substituting the glorious prospect of killing Hector for the original last four lines. Achilles responds with an impassioned speech, rejecting Odysseus’ arguments roughly in reverse order. What good will honor do if he is dead? Why has Agamemnon waited so long to share the plunder equitably? If Menelaus and the rest have gone to war for the sake of Helen, why should not Achilles do the same against Agamemnon for the sake of Briseis? Achilles again threatens to return home to Pthia, claiming that he prefers what awaits him there to all the gifts promised by Agamemnon. As if convincing himself of the righteousness of this course, he recalls Thetis’ prophecy about his two futures: a quick but glorious death at Troy, or a return home and a long life of domestic tranquility. Last of all, Ajax takes his turn. In his blunt way, he suggests that Achilles has moved well outside the realm of societal norms (nomos); in society, even a murderer can be forgiven. Unmoved, Achilles swears not to return to the battle until the Trojans have set the Achaeans ablaze. The embassy returns and reports Achilles’ decision; Diomedes says they must fight on without him, and the others agree.

Commentary:

9.186-188 After numerous setbacks on the battlefield, Agamemnon has agreed to ask for Achilles’ return – he sends Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax on the mission, and they pray “for an easy time in convincing Achilles” – [Agamemnon has had to swallow his pride – an important development, caused by Zeus’ intervention, at the request of Thetis at the end of Book 1]

9.189-194 Achilles is plucking a lyre, singing songs of “the glories / Of heroes in war” – [Just as he hopes people will sing of his glories in years to come – and as we now do]

9.201-202 Achilles is a gracious host “To the Greeks I love best, even in my rage” – [The Greek concept of hospitality is very important – Achilles quickly offers wine and food – Hospitality will be a key theme throughout The Odyssey]

9.221-227 [Note that they perform the sacrifice and enjoy the meal before even raising the topic at hand]

9.232-234 Odysseus thanks Achilles but acknowledges that the Greeks “fear the worst” in the fight with the Trojans – the Greeks cannot save the ships without Achilles’ strength

9.252-253 Odysseus encourages Achilles to think of himself and the “regret” he will feel if he allows “irreparable harm” to come to his fellow Greeks – [Odysseus tries to play the guilt card]

9.255-263 The next appeal is to the memory of Achilles’ father, Peleus, who had cautioned

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
him to “control” his “proud spirit” – Achilles should let go of his anger

9.264-273 Next comes the bribe – Agamemnon is offering gifts many times more valuable than the material stakes in the original quarrel – [Note the physical possessions: gold, cauldrons, horses – and “seven women”]

9.274-277 Agamemnon will give back Briseis, the object of the quarrel – he “will solemnly swear / He never went to bed and lay with her / Or did what is natural between women and men” – [Doth he protest too much? Do we believe him?]?

9.278-283 And there’s more if Achilles helps the Greeks succeed in sacking Troy: a ship full of booty, plus twenty Trojan women of his choice – [Again, women are treated as objects and prizes – and the presumption is that Achilles could feel free to do “what is natural”]

9.284-301 And if they succeed in returning safely to Greece, Achilles can marry one of Agamemnon’s daughters – [Note that three survive - he had sacrificed Iphigenia before setting sail!] – and Achilles will get “seven populous cities to rule over as well – [All told, this is a huge set of prizes for Achilles, a sign of Agamemnon’s desperation and of Achilles’ importance to the cause]

9.302-306 But the biggest reward will be the “glory” we will win from the Greek troops who have been suffering so much – “They will honor you / Like a god”

9.307-310 And to top it off, Odysseus plays up to Achilles’ competitive spirit by noting that he could get Hector if Achilles fights now – [The greatest glory will come from the defeating the greatest opponent] – [What do we make of this? Would you take this deal? Why, or why not?]

9.312-441 Achilles answers at length in a speech that combines spiteful rejection of the may gifts Agamemnon offers as well as deep reflections on the inevitability of death – but the bottom line is that Achilles refuses to change his mind

9.324-327 “It doesn’t matter if you stay in camp or fight / In the end, everybody comes out the same / Coward and hero get the same reward: / You die whether you slack off or work” – [This is Achilles at his least heroic – and his most dismissive about the war – for now he is rejecting the idea that there could be any higher meaning for the war – But do we agree with him about life in general: Should we really conclude that it makes no difference whether we slack off or work? Does work have no higher meaning than just slacking off?]

9.331-344 Achilles has been “Like a bird who feeds her chicks / Whatever she finds, and goes without herself” – [Is this a fair analogy?] – Achilles has brought back loot from 23 different cities, yet Agamemnon has kept most of the spoils for himself – and he has robbed Achilles of his particular prize in Briseis

9.345-354 Achilles rejects a war fought for the sake of returning Helen to Menelaus – other men love their wives just as well – and Achilles loved Briseis – “It doesn’t matter / That I won her with my spear” – [Really? Does Briseis get a say on this? Achilles laments that Agamemnon took Briseis from him – but how would Briseis feel about being taken in the first place? Can we give voice to her feelings in this matter?]
9.362-368 Hector did not dare come close to the Greek camp while Achilles fought – but now he fill fight again because Achilles resolves to sail off the next morning.

9.380-385 Achilles wants Odysseus to report his words publicly in order to anger the Greeks against Agamemnon – the “shameless bastard” should no longer be able to exploit his troops.

9.386-414 Achilles rejects all the gifts Agamemnon offers – even, and especially, Agamemnon’s daughter in marriage – Achilles knows he can have his pick of women when he returns home.

9.415-422 Achilles on the value of life: “Nothing is worth my life, not all the riches” – “a man’s life cannot be won back / Once his breath has passed beyond his clenched teeth” – [Another issue where we should ponder whether we agree – Are any possessions worth the risk on one’s life? And if not, what if anything is worth putting one’s life on the line?]

9.423-429 Achilles, unlike other men, knows his destiny – his divine mother has told him of the “two fates” that sweep him on to death – If he stays to fight, he will never return home – but “If I return home to my dear fatherland / My glory is lost but my life will be long” – [This is the central question for Achilles – and in this instance he is very forcefully rejecting glory – But his fame in this epic depends on the fact that he later changes his mind]

9.430-443 Achilles advises Odysseus and all the other Greeks to go home too – and they respond with shocked silence.

9.444-639 Phoenix follows Odysseus with another fruitless appeal to Achilles, telling a long story about Meleager who also allowed his countrymen to die because he was too proud to fight – he only joined the battle when it was already late – Phoenix introduces the story by recalling that he had helped to raise Achilles, caring for him when he was a young, sick child – the key message comes in this passage:

9.509-511 “But you have to master your proud spirit. / It’s not right for you to have a pitiless heart. / Even the gods can bend” – [Achilles should not think of himself as better than the gods – that would be the height of hubris]

9.642-665 Ajax makes the final appeal to Achilles, but he has resigned himself to rejection – “Achilles / Has made his great heart savage. / He is a cruel man, and has no regard / For the love that his friends honored him with” – Ajax invokes the custom of ‘blood payment’ where even the family of a murdered man can accept payment from a murderer – “But you / The gods have replaced your heart / With flint and malice” all for a single girl – Achilles should instead “Show some generosity / And some respect” – [Note that Odysseus and Phoenix had appealed to Achilles’ better nature – but Ajax is pretty much writing him off as a hopeless cause]

9.667-678 Achilles does not so much defend himself as accept the charge against him – while maintaining yet again that he has been wronged – and pledging not to fight – [Note here the slight shift in Achilles’ pledge – he will not sail off in the morning but instead stay on shore by the ships – confident that Hector will not dare attack while he is present]

9.684-691 [Note that after the discussion, Achilles beds down with Diomede, a girl he
captured in Lesbos, and Patroclus with Iphis, a girl Achilles had seized for him – Once again, women are just prizes for the Greek heroes]

9.702-718 Odysseus breaks the bad news to Agamemnon that Achilles has refused the gifts and will not fight – [Should Agamemnon have gone to apologize in person? Would it have made a difference?]

9.722-733 Diomedes, another Greek hero, says Agamemnon never should have even tried to win Achilles over – he was “arrogant enough without your help” – “He’ll fight later, all right, / When he is ready, or a god tells him to” – [Diomedes is right about that – Achilles will only fight when he has his own reason – Agamemnon has no influence over him anymore]

[What is our judgment of Achilles in this episode? Petulant, or principled? Should we respect his example, or reject it?]

Assignment #5 cont’d Book 16: 1-107 pages 79-82

Book 16 Summary: A weeping Patroclus tells Achilles of the Greeks' plight. He asks Achilles to allow him to wear Achilles’ armor and to lead the Myrmidons into battle. Achilles reiterates his own reasons for staying out of the contest; although his anger has abated, he can not fight until the battle reaches his own ships. But he consents to the plan of Patroclus, warning him not to advance into the plain, but only to drive the Trojans away from the ships.

Commentary:

16.1-5 Patroclus goes to Achilles in tears because so many Greeks lives have been lost in battle – Achilles “pities” him

16.6-20 Achilles’ effort to console Patroclus gets off to a curious, mocking start: “You are like a little girl, pestering her mother / To pick her up, pulling at her hem / As she tries to hurry off and looking up at her / With tears in her eyes until she gets way” – Achilles concedes that the death of a parent would be a legitimate cause to grieve – but not the death of some Greeks “who had it coming” – [Achilles is not particularly nice to anyone in this speech!]

16.21-22 [Note that Homer shifts to the second person for this section about Patroclus]

16.23-48 Patroclus answers – first he calls out Achilles: “Don’t be vengeful” – [Even Achilles’ best friend sees this shortcoming] – Diomedes, Odysseus, and Eurypalus all have been injured and can no longer defend the Greek ships

16.32-37 “But you are incurable, / Achilles. God forbid I ever feel the spite / You nurse In your heart. You and your damned / Honor! What good will it do future generations / If you let us go down to this defeat / In cold blood?” – [Note the difference in this appeal from those of Odysseus and Ajax – the criticism is sharper coming from Achilles’ best friend – Patroclus points out the destructiveness of Achilles’ selfish concern for his honor]

16.42-46 Patroclus proposes that Achilles let him wear his armor and lead the counter-attack – if Trojans think Achilles is fighting, then the Greeks might get some needed breathing space – [This is a critical offer from Patroclus – and note that Patroclus is taking the initiative –

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
and note too that Nestor had proposed a similar plan earlier, in a section we did not read]

16.49-50 “And that was how Patroclus, like a child / Begging for a toy, begged for death” – [Recall that Achilles has just likened Patroclus to a little girl – this observation from Homer picks up the portrayal of Patroclus as a child]

16.52-107 Achilles answers Patroclus and agrees to the plan – [Note that the movie Troy changes this crucial element – in the film, Patroclus acts without Achilles’ knowledge or consent – but here Achilles sets the parameters] – Achilles begins by stating once again that he has been wronged – [As if we didn’t know that already!]

16.62-66 Achilles claims “I never meant / To hold my grudge forever” – but would only hold his anger until “the noise of battle lapped at my own ships’ hulls” – [In fact, Achilles has been inconsistent on this point, for he has come very close to sailing home and rejecting the war entirely – and he has said that no cause could get him to risk his life]

16.71-75 Achilles notes that the Trojans have been getting cocky. Something they would never have dared had Achilles been fighting – “They would clog the ditches with their dead--. If Lord Agamemnon knew how to respect me” – [Who is he calling cocky?! – and of course he cannot resist yet another shot at Agamemnon]

16.87-94 Achilles sets limits to what Patroclus can and should do while fighting in his armor – the purpose is to win honor and glory for Achilles – not for Patroclus himself – and Patroclus must return as soon as he drives the Trojans from the Greek ships – “Any success you have against the Trojans / Will be at the expense of my honor” – [It’s always all about Achilles, isn’t it? – Patroclus will soon get killed by exceeding these orders]

16.95-97 Achilles cautions that the gods may intervene for the Greeks if Patroclus goes too far toward Troy – [This statement is an implicit but not a direct caution that Patroclus could be risking his life while Achilles remains by his ship – he never comes right out with a warning that Patroclus could die while fighting in his name]

16.102-107 Achilles concludes with a curious prayer to Zeus, Athena, and Apollo all together: “That all of them, Greeks and Trojans alike / ... Were dead, and only you and I were left” – [Again, more evidence that Achilles does not believe in the Greek cause – there is no patriotism in Achilles on the side of the Greeks – nor is their any particular hatred of the Trojan cause – but he wishes ill to soldiers on both sides in this instance]
Summary: [Meanwhile, Hector forces Ajax to retreat from the defence of his ship, and the burning of the Greek hulls begins. Achilles sees this and hurries to muster the Myrmidons, while Patroclus arms himself. Achilles pours a libation and prays to Zeus for Patroclus’ success. Led by Patroclus, the Myrmidons attack, drive the Trojans back from the ships, and put out the fire. Patroclus himself kills many Trojans between the ships and the ditch, while others flee back towards Troy.] -- Sarpedon comes up to face Patroclus in single combat, and Zeus wonders whether he should rescue his son; but Hera advises him to let destiny take its course, and Zeus agrees. Patroclus kills Sarpedon, who with his dying breath calls upon Glaucus to protect his corpse. Glaucus prays to Apollo, and Apollo responds by healing his wounds, enabling Glaucus to collect a band of Trojans for the fight over Sarpedon’s body. Battle rages around the carcass of Sarpedon, but in the end Zeus decides to postpone Patroclus’ death, and the Greeks are able to strip the body while the Trojans and Lycians flee. Zeus sends Apollo to remove the denuded corpse from the battlefield. Meanwhile Patroclus forgets the warning given him by Achilles, and pursues the Trojans across the plain up to the city walls. Apollo urges Hector to attack Patroclus, but Patroclus continues his rampage, killing ten more men before Apollo himself finally knocks him down and takes away his armor. The dazed and defenseless Patroclus is wounded by a Trojan, Euphorbus, and Hector comes in to finish him off. As he dies, Patroclus predicts the death of Hector at the hands of Achilles.

Commentary:

16.108-454   Patroclus goes into battle and enjoys initial success

16.455-467   Patroclus and the Trojan hero Sarpedon prepare for a showdown – Sarpedon is one of the children of Zeus

16.471-475   Zeus wonders aloud to Hera whether he should spare the life of Sarpedon, whom he loves “more than any man” – [Note this instance of a god considering challenging the Fates – he is tempted to play favorites here]

16.4770-491  Hera will not let him get away with it, saving a man “whose fate has long been fixed” – She warns about the “resentment” Zeus will cause in the other gods, each of whom has particular favorites too – The most Zeus should do is protect Sarpedon’s body so that he can have a proper burial back in Lycia – [Note that the gods are subject to petty desires just as mortals are – Is this any different from teachers playing favorites?]

16.492-496   Zeus reluctantly agrees – “but sheds drops of blood as rain / Upon the earth in honor of his dear son”

16.513-516   Patroclus fells Sarpedon with his spear

16.527-534   Sarpedon exhorts Glaucus and his fellow Trojans with his dying words – he does not want his body desecrated – [The honorable treatment of a corpse is a recurring issue in the Greek world]

16.535-538   Patroclus pulls his spear from Sarpedon’s chest, taking his lungs and his life in the process

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
16.539-586 The Trojan forces rally in order to the win back the body – [As the Greeks soon will do for the body of Patroclus]

16.678-692 Zeus weighs in his mind and in his scales whether Patroclus should die now or live to kill more Greeks – he decides to give Patroclus more time, and Hector’s “blood turn[ed] milky” as he sensed that “Zeus’ scales were tipping” again against the Trojans as he sent Patroclus forward

16.717-723 Patroclus exceeds his orders from Achilles and presses on after the Trojans – he is “mindless of the black fates gathering above” – Homer addresses Patroclus directly: “Zeus’ mind is stronger than men’s / And Zeus now put fury in your heart” – [The success that Patroclus enjoys is transitory – in fact, it leads him on toward his death at the hands of the Trojans]

16.724-731 Patroclus kills many Trojans as he pushes forward

16.732-744 But Apollo “flicked” Patroclus away from the walls of Troy – Apollo commands: “Get back, Patroclus, back where you belong. / Troy is fated to fall, but not to you, / Not even to Achilles, a better man by far.” – [Apollo cannot save the city of Troy, but he can deter Patroclus – and we learn that not even Achilles will topple Troy – We and Homer’s audience all know that Odysseus will be the one to achieve the feat]

16.752-756 Apollo, in the guise of Hector’s uncle, commands Hector to go after Patroclus – [Note that Apollo is helping to orchestrate this showdown – Achilles will take out his new anger on Hector, but Apollo bears even more responsibility]

16.764-784 Patroclus defends himself by hurling a rock that strikes Hector’s charioteer, Cebriones – in a very graphic description, Cebriones’ “eyeballs spurted out and dropped / Into the dirt before his feet” – Patroclus then mockingly gloats “Nice dive!” – [What do we think of Patroclus’ actions here? Classless?]

16.785-814 Hector and Patroclus now fight over the corpse of Cebriones – “Like a pair of lions fighting over a slain deer”

16.819 “The Greeks’ success exceeded their destiny” – another warning from Homer that Patroclus’ success will be only temporary

16.822-831 Patroclus kills nine men on each of three charges – But then death comes to meet him – “it was / Apollo, whom you did not see in the thick of battle, / Standing behind you, and the flat of his hand / Found the space between your shoulder blades – [Note that Apollo, not Hector, strikes the killing blow – the god is directing the action]

16.832-840 The helmet falls from Patroclus’ head – the gods would never let that happen to Achilles – Zeus gives the helmet to Hector, “whose own death was not far off”

16.846-857 The young Euphorbus strikes Patroclus with his spear – but then “ran back where he belonged” – [Note that it is not enough for Euphorbus to kill the hero – it must be a combination of Apollo and Hector]

16.858-869 Hector now muscles in to deliver the death blow – he is like a lion finishing off a
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boar

16.871-883 Hector taunts Patroclus as he dies, calling him a “little fool” – he declares “the vultures will eat you / On this very spot” – [If we expected nobility or generosity of spirit from Hector, we do not get it here – he mocks Patroclus, just as Patroclus had mocked Sarpedon – and just as Achilles will mock Hector in their final battle]

16.885-894 Patroclus remains defiant, declaring that Apollo and Euphorbus deserve the credit for killing him – Hector is nothing but third, and Patroclus predicts Hector’s death at the hands of Achilles

16.899-901 Hector now expects to fight Achilles – and is willing to take his chances

[The death of Patroclus is what incites Achilles to return to battle – he will want revenge against Hector – But has this scene justified Achilles in redirecting his rage away from Agamemnon and toward Hector? Or do the gods continue to orchestrate each step?]
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Assignment #7  Book 18: 1-259  pages 101-109
Book 19: 1-87  pages 114-116

Book 18 Summary: Antilochus reports the death of Patroclus to Achilles, whose cry of woe reaches the ears of Thetis. She leads all the nymphs in a song of mourning (threnody), then goes to see Achilles. He explains that Patroclus is dead, and mother and son grieve together, both knowing that this means Achilles must reenter the battle and eventually die young at Troy. Without admitting fault, Achilles regrets that there is such a thing as anger among men. Thetis agrees that he must fight now, but tells him to wait while she fetches new armor from Hephaestus. Meanwhile on the battlefield Hector again threatens to win Patroclus’ body. On Iris’ instructions, Achilles steps out beside the ditch and shouts his war cry. This, together with Athena’s own shout and a terrifying flame she creates above Achilles’ head, is enough to frighten off the Trojans and to get Patroclus’ body back to Achilles’ shelter.

Commentary:

18.6-16 Achilles fears the death of Patroclus even before Antilochus arrives with the news – he curses Patroclus for exceeding orders

18.23 “Black grief” envelops Achilles when he gets the report

18.56-67 Achilles’ mother, Thetis, laments as well, and resolves to console her son

18.77-81 Thetis asks why Achilles is crying - after all, Zeus has answered his prayer by making the Greeks suffer horribly

18.83-98 Achilles answers that his friend is dead – and he wishes he had never been born – Achilles does not want to remain alive if Hector still lives

18.100-101 Thetis cautions that Hector’s death means Achilles’ death too

18.103-111 Achilles is willing to die now, since he has dine no good for Patroclus – he dismisses himself as “a dead weight on the earth” – though he “stands alone” among the Greeks when it comes to war

18.112-116 Achilles offers a profound observation about the corrosive nature of strife, for mortals and for gods: “I wish all strife could stop, among gods / And among men, and anger too—it sends / Sensible men into fits of temper, / and it drips down our throats sweeter than honey / And mushrooms up in our bellies like smoke” – [This is Achilles realization of the costs of his own “Wrath” – Is this whole epic a celebration of Achilles’ “Rage”? Or is it a condemnation?]

18.117-119 Achilles will put aside his anger against Agamemnon – “And conquer our pride, because we must” – [Is this the lesson of the epic? Note other instances throughout this course when pride or arrogance or rage gets Greeks into trouble]

18.120-124 Achilles will now fight Hector and accept his fate “whenever it pleases Zeus” – he knows that he is destined to die in the effort

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
8.130-135  Achilles will now go to win glory – and to make Trojan women cry over her loss – Thetis cannot stop him - [Must his glory come at a cost to others? Has he overcome his rage, or merely channeled it in a new direction?]

18.137-146  Thetis no longer tries to talk him out of his choice of fate – but pledges only to get him a new set of armor to replace when Hector has stripped from Patroclus – she will go to Hephaestus

18.158-175  Meanwhile Hector battles the two Ajaxes for Patroclus’ corpse

18.181-191  Hera sends Iris to command Achilles to win back the corpse himself – she warns that Hector “means to impale the head / On Troy’s palisade after he strips off its skin. / And you just lie there?” – [Note that Achilles will be bloodthirsty when rejecting Hector’s plea for mutual respect when he and Achilles finally square off in Book 22 – Achilles will desecrate Hector’s corpse – but he does so after hearing of Hector’s intent to violate Patroclus]

18.199-206  Achilles responds that he can hardly fight the Trojans without his armor

18.208-212  Iris responds that Achilles need only show his face at the trench and the Trojans will retreat in fear

18.213-218  Athena protects Achilles with a special shining force – [Hera earlier had objected to Achilles sitting out the war, because her Greeks would suffer as a result – and because she resented Zeus’ affection for Thetis – But now Thetis, Hera, Iris, and Athena all team up to support Achilles – Apollo remains the major defender of Hector and the Trojans]

18.226-254  Achilles shouts three times from the trench and the Trojans recoil in fear – The Greeks get Patroclus’ body back after a day of brutal warfare

18.504-662  Hephaestus crafts a beautiful strong shield for Achilles, with many scenes that illustrate the best of life in Heroic Greece

[What do we think of Achilles’ reaction here? Should he be surprised at the outcome? Does he – or should he – feel guilt for getting his friend killed?]

**Assignment #7 cont’d**

**Book 19 Summary**: Achilles receives the armor and is filled with lust for battle. Assured by Thetis that she will prevent Patroclus’ corpse from decaying, he calls the Achaeans to assembly. Without admitting fault, he wishes aloud that he and Agamemnon had never quarreled, and even that Briseis had died before ever becoming the object of the strife. Achilles declares his anger to be at an end.

**Commentary**:  

19.12-17  Thetis delivers the armor to Achilles and instructs him to let Patroclus rest while he goes to fight

19.22-29  Though the other Myrmidons shuddered when they saw the armor, Achilles

“felt his rage seep / Deeper into his bones” – [So is this redirection rather than calming of his rage?]

19.31-39 Achilles accepts the gift from the gods and is ready to fight – but he worries about Patroclus’ body remaining unburied

19.41-48 Thetis assures him that she will preserve the corpse – but more importantly, Achilles must now call an assembly and “renounce / Your rage against Agamemnon” – [Again, the rage does not end so much as it gets channeled toward Hector]

19.52-67 Achilles calls the assembly – and they all attend because Achilles is back – Diomedes, Odysseus, and Agamemnon all attend, showing the wounds they suffered in Achilles’ absence

19.68-76 Achilles acknowledges to Agamemnon that no one has benefited from the anger they each displayed in their quarrel over a girl – only the Trojans have gained “while I nursed my grudge”

19.77-80 Achilles conquers his pride and renounces his anger – “There is no more need for me /To rage relentlessly” – instead the Greeks should get back into battle, with Achilles in the lead

19.86-87 “and the Greeks cheered” – their champion has returned

[What do we make of Achilles’ motivation here? Is he going back to fight for a common cause? Has he seen the error of his ways? Or has he merely redirected his rage to a new target? And is this new target any more or less justified than the original? Or should Achilles direct his anger at himself, for letting his friend die in his place? Or might Achilles realize this already? Does he see himself as a true hero? And do we?]
Summary: Hector remains alone outside the walls as Achilles realizes that he has been tricked. Priam and Hecuba plead with their son, urging him to come inside the walls and not to face Achilles alone. Hector ignores their pleas, while in his own mind he ponders his fate, wishfully imagining that it might be possible to make terms with Achilles, but in the end resolved to stand up to him. When Achilles draws near, Hector is seized by fear and runs away, with Achilles close behind. Zeus considers rescuing Hector, but Athena convinces him to allow her to help Achilles instead. Zeus weighs the destinies of both men in the scales, and Hector’s is heavier; his death is therefore at hand.

Commentary:

22.8-9 After the battle has raged, “Destiny / Had Hector pinned, waiting for death” – [The gods have decided that Achilles must win]

22.11-17 Apollo taunts Achilles after he has drawn him away from Hector – the mortal can never kill the god

22.19-25 Achilles accuses Apollo of playing a dirty trick in misleading him – but he swears “I’d make you pay, if I could” – [Achilles does not fear arguing back against the god]

22.31-44 Priam spies Achilles running in the distance and groans at the thought of his son’s impending death

22.45-79 Priam pleads with Hector not to fight – [his appeal is similar to Andromache’s back in Book 6] – Achilles will stop at nothing and has already killed or enslaved so many of Priam’s sons – “Live to save the men and women of Troy. / Don’t just hand Achilles the glory / And throw your life away.”

22.80-85 Priam laments the horrible fate of a father who sees his son die: “When a young man is killed in war, / Even though his body is slashed with bronze, / He lies there beautiful in death, noble. / But when the dogs maraud an old man’s head, / Griming his white hair and beard and private parts, / There is no human fate more pitiable” – [Wow – now that’s a guilt trip! Worse than the fate that Andromache anticipates as a widow? And do we even agree that there can be “beauty” in the death of a young man?]

22.91-99 After Priam fails to move Hector, his mother Hecuba takes a turn, baring her breast and calling for pity – If the “madman” Achilles wins, Hecuba will never get to mourn properly for her son, nor will Andromache – “Dogs will eat your body by the Greek ships”

22.100-113 The arguments of his parents do not persuade Hector, who stands waiting for Achilles, “tense and coiled like a snake”

22.113-125 But Hector is troubled with “brooding thoughts” – He can’t bear to hear “lesser men” say that he risked the Trojan army while he himself backed away from battle – “I’ll be much better off / Facing Achilles, either killing him / Or dying honorably before the city” – [Once again a hero is concerned about his reputation for courage – this response is consistent with what he said to Andromache back in Book 6]
The Iliad – Summary and Commentary – Lombardo’s *Essential Iliad*

22.126-148 Hector briefly considers laying down his weapons and negotiating the return of Helen to the Greeks – and sharing equally the treasures of Troy – [This would be a rejection of the entire Trojan reason for fighting in the first place – though sending Helen back to Greece immediately could have prevented the trouble in the first place] – But then Hector comes to his senses and realizes that Achilles would kill him immediately if he were unarmed – “This is no time for talking” in the manner of a boy and girl – No “sweet talk” but instead “mortal combat” – he must await the decision of the Gods – [Hector resolves that he must be tough]

22.155-157 But then, as soon as Hector sees Achilles’ spear, “he lost his nerve, / Panicked, and ran” – [Is this heroic? What do we think of Hector at this point??]

22.178-183 The race is on – “A great man out front, a far greater behind” – this is a race “For the lifeblood of Hector, breaker of horses” – [Homer signals here that Achilles is the “greater” man – Do we agree?]

22.191-199 Zeus laments that Achilles is running down Hector, who had “burned many an ox thigh” in Zeus’ honor – Zeus asks the other gods whether “We should save him from death or deliver him / Into Achilles’ hands, good man though he be” – [The final fate of most men is determined, but Zeus and the other gods still retain control over timing]

22.201-205 Athena tells Zeus he can do as he pleases, but he should not expect the other gods to approve – [Social pressure applies even on Olympus – even Zeus can be shamed into doing the right thing]

22.207-209 Zeus quickly concedes that Athena is right – and she may now intervene on Achilles’ behalf

22.223-226 “Running in a dream, you can’t catch up, / You can’t catch up and you can’t get away. / No more could Achilles catch Hector / Or Hector escape” – [A vivid image, showing the lack of control that either man has]

22.227-230 Only Apollo’s intervention saves Hector for the time being, by putting “life in his knees” – [Zeus has now backed away, and has allowed Athena to aid Achilles while Apollo stands by Hector one more time]

22.231-234 Achilles commands the Greeks not to shoot at Hector – he wants the kill for himself

22.235-240 But then the moment of truth: Zeus weighs both men’s fate in the scale and “Hector’s doom sank down / Toward Hades” – and then, in respect of that judgment, Apollo leaves Hector on his own – [Even Zeus respects the scales of fate]

22.243-250 Athena informs Achilles that only “glory” awaits him now – Athena pledges that she will convince Hector to put up a fight

Summary: Athena disguises herself as Hector's brother Deiphobus, and so persuades Hector to stop running away so that the two of them may face Hector together. Hector stops and addresses Achilles, proposing that before fighting they should agree that the winner will treat the loser's body correctly. Achilles refuses this deal and attacks. His first cast misses, but Athena retrieves the spear for him. Hector's spear bounces off the shield of Achilles, and after calling in vain on Deiphobus to provide another Hector realizes how Athena has misled him. Now Achilles kills Hector, boasts aloud of his intention to maltreat Hector's body, and says that he will never ransom it back to Priam for proper funereal rites. The Achaens crowd around and stab the corpse, then Achilles drags it back to the camp behind his chariot. The focus shifts to the city, where we get the mournful reactions of Priam, Hecuba, and Andromache. Andromache's worst fears, imagined in Book 6, have now come to pass; her lament is mostly about what a hard life now lies ahead for her fatherless son, Astyanax.

Commentary:

22.251-265 Athena goes to Hector in the guise as the Trojan warrior Deiphobus and counsels him to stand and fight – but this is all a trick

22.277-285 Hector stops and asks that Achilles swear a solemn oath that each man will respect the body of the defeated – [This is a key request on Hector's part, recognizing the shared concern for the bodies of the dead – But let's not forget Hector's own willingness to defile the corpse of Patroclus if he could – Achilles certainly will not forget the battle over that body]

22.287-298 Achilles issues a cold reply, rejecting any “deals”: “Do lions make peace treaties with men? / Do wolves and lambs agree to get along? / No, they hate each other to the core, / And that’s how it is between you and me” – Achilles now trusts Athena to help him make Hector “pay in a lump / For the agony you’ve caused by killing my friend” – [Should we expect Achilles to be more gracious here? Could he not get his revenge while still showing some respect for his opponent? Is his rage under control? Or is it now worse than ever?]

22.306-315 Hector “taunts” Achilles after his first spear thrust misses the mark (though Athena gives the spear right back to him) – Achilles has only “big words and empty talk” – Only a “direct hit in the chest” and “a god's help” could possibly stop Hector – [Hector is quick to return the trash talk – though he does identify the combination that will soon fell him]

22.316-333 Hector throws his first javelin, but when he strikes only the shield, he asks Deiphobus for another – But his companion is not there – At last Hector realizes that the gods have sealed his fate: “I hear the gods calling me to my death” – Zeus and Apollo / Must have chosen this long ago” – “Well, this is fate. / But I will not perish without doing some great deed / That future generations will remember” – [This is a crucial moment of recognition and acceptance on Hector's part – But note that he shares Achilles' concern for doing great deeds that will live on past his death – What is more striking to us? The similarities or the differences between the Greeks and the Trojans? Between Achilles and Hector?]

22.350-364 Achilles counters Hector’s attack with a charge – he find the weak spot by the neck where Hector’s armor (stripped from Patroclus) leaves him exposed – [This is Achilles’ own
armor, let us remember] – there Achilles drives his spear through – [This is the death blow]

22.364-373 Achilles exults and offers the final insult about desecration: “Dogs and birds are going to draw out your guts” – [The rage remains strong!]

22.375-381 Hector begs for respect one more time – do not allow “the dogs to mutilate my body” – but accept a ransom from Priam instead

22.383-393 More bloodthirsty rage from Achilles as he rejects the plea: “I wish my stomach would let me / Cut off your flesh and eat it raw / For what you have done to me” – [Wow! It’s not enough for the dogs to do the job – Achilles wishes he were a cannibal! How can we ever accept Achilles as any kind of a role model?] – He will accept no ransom – “No, dogs and birds will eat your every last scrap” – [OK, so he rejects cannibalism – but he remains committed to desecration]

22.395-400 Hector’s last words pass judgment on Achilles: “Your heart is a lump / Of iron” – But the gods will not forget – the fates decree that “Paris and Apollo will destroy you” – [Note that we do not see Achilles’ death in The Iliad – But the story is that Paris shoots him with an arrow that strike Achilles in the heel – the one place where he remain vulnerable (when Thetis dipped him in the Styx for protection) – Note too that Achilles will not bring the fall of Troy – that will be left to Odysseus with the trick of the “Trojan Horse”]

22.405-406 Achilles accepts his fate: “Die and be done with it. As for my fate, / I’ll accept it whenever Zeus sends it” – [This confirms that Achilles is not trying to avoid his fate – killing Hector will not preserve his life, but instead hasten his own death – but Achilles has come to terms with that]

22.407-415 The other Greeks admire Hector’s beautiful body when Achilles strips him of the armor – but they “smirk” and note that he is now “a lot softer to the touch” – [Is this petty on their part?]

22.418-437 Achilles first considers continuing the assault directly on the citadel of Troy – But then he remembers that he must first give Patroclus proper burial – He then exults that “The power and the glory / Are now ours. We have killed the great Hector” – [It’s worth noting that Achilles uses the plural “we” and “ours” in what appears to be his greatest moment of individual triumph – This seems a significant change from his previous individualism]

22.438-441 [But this brief moment of generosity toward his fellow Greeks is immediately countered by Achilles’ insistence on the “shame and defilement” of Hector’s corpse] – Achilles drags Hector behind his chariot

22.447-449 Zeus ultimately is responsible for the desecration: “In this way Zeus / Delivered Hector into his enemies’ hands / To be defiled in his own native land”

22.460-473 Priam leads the lamentations of the fate of Hector from the walls of Troy – he proposes that he go to Achilles to offer a ransom for the body – he will rely on Achilles’ respect for his own father: “I want to see / If that monster will respect my age, pity me / For the sake of his own father, Peleus” – [In fact this is what Priam will do in Book 24 – and it will work, with the support of the gods]

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
The Iliad – Summary and Commentary – Lombardo’s Essential Iliad

22.476-483 Hector’s mother Hecuba declares herself “desolate”

22.484-510 Hector’s wife Andromache remains for the moment unaware of the death of her husband – she has heard Hecuba’s voice and goes to investigate, fearing the worst

22.511-529 Andromache goes out “like a madwoman” and “saw her husband / As the horses dragged him disdainfully”

22.530-574 Andromache’s lament – “Better never to have been born” – He main concern is for Astyanax – “There is nothing left for him in life but pain” – She pities the life of the orphan who always have beg and suffer taunts from other kids – [Is this in fact the fate of the orphaned?] – Andromache resolves to burn on the pyre all of Hector’s beautiful clothes, for they are of no use to him now – “Burning them will be / Your glory before Trojan men and women” – [This is the one last duty Andromache can serve on behalf of her husband – the final focus is on his “glory”]

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
Assignment #10  Book 24: 497-860  pages 147-157

Summary: Priam enters and supplicates Achilles, strongly reminding him of his own beloved father Peleus. Together Achilles and Priam weep, each for his own. Then Achilles replies to Priam's speech, voicing admiration for his courage in coming, and painting a famous picture of the inconstancy of mortal happiness (the two urns of Zeus). Achilles orders his servants to clean and wrap the body for moving, but to keep it out of Priam's sight. He apologizes for breaking his promise and allowing Hector to be buried. Achilles then tells Priam the story of Niobe, whose twelve children all died as a result of her hubris, to illustrate the principle that even amidst great sadness people must eat. They feast, and Achilles agrees to restrain the Achaeans for twelve days while the Trojans have Hector's funeral. Priam goes to sleep outside of Achilles' shelter, until Hermes awakens him in the middle of the night and guides him back to the city. The three women closest to Hector now take turns leading the lament. First is Andromache, who repeats her earlier theme of the hard future ahead for herself and Astyanax, then closes with a wish that the last moments she had with Hector had been more intimate. Second is Hecuba, who asserts that Hector was her favorite son. Third is Helen, who praises Hector for having befriended her when others were harsh. The Trojans gather wood for the pyre for nine days. On the tenth they immolate Hector, and on the eleventh they bury him.

Commentary:

Even after Achilles has held the funeral for Patroclus, he continues to desecrate the body of Hector, but the gods agree that it is time for him to give up his rage and to return the body to Priam – Apollo, Thetis, Iris, and Hermes all play a role in convincing Achilles to accept the ransom that Priam will offer.

24.497-510  Priam goes to the house of Achilles to beg for his son’s return: “He stood / Close to Achilles, and touching his knees / He kissed the dread and murderous hands / That had killed so many of his sons” – [These are symbols of absolute supplication – Painful as it is to do so, Priam shows respect to Achilles]

24.520-543  Priam begs, urging Achilles to remember his father – Nothing is left for Priam, for “the god of war” has cut down all of his sons” – He concludes: “I have borne what no man / Who has walked the earth has ever yet borne. / I have kissed the hand of the man who killed my son”

24.544-556  Priam’s speech works, as it moves both men to tears over the losses they have suffered – “And Achilles cried for his father and / For Patroclus”

24.557-595  Achilles acknowledges Priam’s suffering and his courage – he urges Priam to sit and rest, and then reflects: “Yes, the gods have woven pain into mortal lives, / While they are free from care” – [This is the KEY distinction between mortals and gods, and Achilles here shares the bond of the human condition with Priam] – “Two jars / Sit at the doorstep of Zeus, filled with gifts / That he gives, one full of good things, / The other of evil” – Most men get a mix from both jars, though some get only evil – [No man gets only the good] – Even Peleus, favored in many ways, will “not leave offspring to succeed him in power” – for Achilles himself soon will die – Priam too had many riches – “But then the gods have brought you trouble” – “You must endure this grief and not constantly grieve” – [Despite the rage this war has inspired in Achilles, here he is finally putting it aside and seeing the common humanity in Priam]

Summaries drawn from http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html
Priam wants only to get the body back – he offers the ransom so that Hector will not lie “uncared for” any longer.

Achilles “glowered” at this plea – Priam has “provoked” him with his impatience – Achilles knows that Priam comes with the aid of the gods – but he still issues a threat – “So just stop stirring up grief in my heart, / Or I might not let you out of here alive, old man— / Suppliant though you are—and sin against Zeus” – [The rage remains! Achilles is always on the brink – and here he expresses a willingness even to cross the will of Zeus, who protects suppliants – Recall that Achilles was willing to fight Apollo back in Book 22]

Achilles then proceeds with arrangements for the body – though he accepts the ransom first – he has the women clean the body so as not to provoke any anger in Priam that would in turn “arouse / Achilles’ passion” – [He guards against his own rage – he knows he might still kill Priam and thereby sin against Zeus. Is Achilles always going to remain right on the edge?]

Achilles calls out to Patroclus and asks forgiveness for showing any honor to Hector’s body

Achilles addresses Priam again and gives the body back – he even reminds him to eat

Achilles shares a meal with Priam and prepares a bed for him - but he cautions “in a bitter tone“ that he does not want Priam’s presence reported back to Agamemnon – [The bitterness is directed at Agamemnon, not Priam] – Achilles asks Priam how many days he needs for proper funeral rites for Hector – he pledges to hold back the Greek army for as much time as Priam needs – [Now can we finally respect Achilles for doing the right thing?]

Priam asks for twelve days – “And Achilles, strong, swift, and godlike: / ‘You will have your armistice’” – [This is a clearly positive portrayal of Achilles, perhaps the least ambiguous in the whole epic]

Note that Achilles sleeps “inside his well-built hut, / And by his side lay lovely Briseis” – [Achilles has his “prize” in the end]

“Gods and heroes slept the night through” – But Hermes hurries Priam back to Troy, lest his city have to pay an even larger ransom for his capture

Cassandra, Priam’s daughter, is the first to see the return of her brother’s body in the morning – she calls all out to greet him – [Cassandra is famous for issuing warnings that no one heeds, but this instance they appear to welcome her announcement]

Andromache laments first – Their son is “doomed” and will not reach manhood before the city falls – all the women will be led off into captivity – some angry Greek is likely to kill Astyanax in revenge for Hector’s killing – Hector has not given Andromache the satisfaction of holding his hand one last time before death – [The shift in perspective here is confusing – she seems to shift between addressing Hector and addressing Astyanax]

Hecuba is next – she notes that the gods have loved Hector and cared for him

even in death – [This is more positive that Andromache’s speech]

24.814-830 Helen follows next and thanks Hector for the kindness he always showed her – Hector had a “gentle heart and gentle words” – no one is left to pity Helen – all “shudder” at her

24.833-837 Priam announces the truce for the funeral rites – the Greeks will not attack in this time

24.841-860 On the tenth day the Trojans burn the body of Hector – they then lay him in the grave and the tomb – and finish with a “glorious feat” – “That was the funeral of Hector, breaker of horses” – [And the funeral, not the final battle of the war or even the death of Achilles, concludes the epic. What can we conclude from this ending? Does it signal to us what the epic really was all about?]