contemporary or disciple of the *Iliad* poet but, despite the manifest differences in the social and moral vision of the two poems, there is no conclusive evidence to rule out single authorship for both works. The ancient tradition makes Homer an Ionian of Asia Minor, with Chios and Smyrna having the strongest claims to be his birthplace. Two blind bards are mentioned in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, presumably because blind poets were as common then as blind piano-tuners are now. But there is no evidence that Homer was blind himself. He knew the area around Troy and may have earned his living there as a professional singer. It is a very attractive modern speculation that the curious and disproportionate role of Aeneas in the *Iliad* is due to the poet's courtly flattery of contemporary rulers in the Troad, who traced their genealogy to Aeneas (Reinhardt, 1961, 450–6).

Modern archaeologists have reconstructed the history of settlements on the site of Troy beyond 3000 BC. Homer's Troy to them is 'Troy VIIa'. This settlement came to a violent end around 1200 BC and was in all probability destroyed by war, although a fire cannot be ruled out. Was it destroyed in the 'Trojan War', i.e. a collective expedition by mainland Greeks? The ancients had no doubt on this score. Even so sceptical a writer as Thucydides used the *Iliad* as a source for his review of early Greek history on the assumption that by discounting the elaborations of poetic fancy he could recover the historical truth about a pan-Hellenic expedition. Modern scholars are divided on the subject (Finley). Some think that the very existence of the *Iliad* is proof that such an expedition must have taken place, although it surely did not last ten years or have Helen as its cause. Others point to instances in which we have independent evidence about the event a heroic poem purports to celebrate and can only marvel at the gap between history and fiction. No heroic poem without ruins, Albin Lesky (1966, 12) has written. From our knowledge of other heroic poetry we may conclude that the mere ruins in the Troad were a sufficient factual irritant to produce in time the pearl of the *Iliad*. We may well believe that the ruins of Troy were the 'cause' of the *Iliad*, but we must not expect the *Iliad* to tell us much about the cause of those ruins.

Whether or not there was a Trojan War, the *Iliad* rests on a tradition of versemaking that goes back centuries beyond Homer and probably reaches into Mycenaean times. Homer's Greeks do not call themselves Hellenes as the Greeks of the classical period (and probably of Homer's day) did, and the political map of the *Iliad* reflects an old pattern of settlements that was radically altered with the population movements towards the end of the second millennium conveniently known as the Dorian invasion. The *Iliad* refers to some objects such as Nestor's cup or the boar's helmet that can be matched with Mycenaean artefacts discovered by modern archaeologists. In the case of the *phasganon arguroëlon*, 'the silver-studded sword', not only is there a corresponding artefact, but also the Homeric phrase can be

matched with words that appear on the Mycenaean clay tablets inscribed in the Linear B script that represents an early form of Greek. Homer's poetic language also includes archaic words that predate the dialect divisions that took place centuries before his time. But Homer knew less about Mycenaean Greece than is taught today in a good undergraduate course. To illustrate his epics with Mycenaean pictures is a profound anachronism, even where the Homeric object has a Mycenaean origin, for it provides the verbal image with a pictorial equivalent that in most cases neither Homer nor his audience had ever seen. The past remembered in the *Iliad* and the Mycenae excavated by the twentieth-century archaeologist are two very different things.

Homer lived towards the end of what we call the 'dark age' of Greece, partly because we know little about it, and partly because archaeological evidence suggests that the material culture of this period was poor by comparison both with Mycenaean and with classical Greece. With the collapse of Mycenaean civilisation writing disappeared from Greece for four centuries until a new form of writing, adapted from the Phoenician alphabet, spread through Greece from about 800 BC on. But inscriptional evidence remains very scant until about 600 BC, when Greek history in the proper sense may be said to begin and when we find ourselves in the world of the city states that had slowly evolved during the dark centuries. It is apparent from this crude sketch that it matters a good deal whether the composition of the *Iliad* is dated around 750 BC or 650 BC. If we adopt the later date, Homer becomes the citizen of a world that had been familiar with writing for several generations and cannot have been very different from the world of the city states in their archaic phase. The earlier date puts Homer in a world that had barely discovered writing and may still have been quite different from the later polis culture. (The relationship of Homer to writing is more fully discussed below, p. 162.)

Many Greek historians like to date Homer as early as they can because they want a big space to measure the difference between heroic poetry and the world of Archilochus and Sappho, who can be dated with confidence into the mid and late seventh century. But, as Walter Burkert (1976) has pointed out, only fifty-seven years separate the *St Matthew Passion* from *The Marriage of Figaro*. If we emphasise, on the one hand, the unquestionable elements of continuity between Homer and later literature, and accept, on the other hand, that cultural change often occurs very suddenly, a late date is not implausible, and it has the advantage of greatly reducing the problems that relate to the transmission of the text until the middle of the sixth century, where we have for the first time evidence of a written and quasi-official text prepared for continuous recitation at the Panathenaean festival.

Whether the author of the *Iliad* flourished in the late eighth or in the early seventh century, his story of the pan-Hellenic expedition against

Troy has much more to do with the history of his own time than with the late Mycenaean age. The world of the Greek city states was characterised both by a propensity for internecine rivalry and by a strong sense of cultural identity and superiority. Greeks of whatever ethnic origin divided the world into those who 'talk Greek' (*hellenizein*) and all the others who make unintelligible noises and are therefore fitly called 'bar-bar-ians'. While Greece never achieved political unity, it developed common religious festivals and competitions that united, for the duration of the event, even cities that were at war. The institutions that maintained the sense of pan-Hellenic identity date back to the eighth century – above all, the Olympic Games, which began in 776 BC. The most powerful of these pan-Hellenic institutions is of course the *Iliad*. One may well ask whether the Greeks, who during the dark centuries colonised much of the eastern and some of the western Mediterranean, would have resisted the centrifugal tendencies of such geographical dispersal had it not been for the common past, the common religion and the common set of values that the *Iliad* 'created', if only by putting traditional materials in canonical form.

Homer's account of the expedition of 'all the Achaeans' against Troy is not a poem 'about' Mycenaean Greece, but it is, in a different sense of 'about', a poem about the pan-Hellenic consciousness of the polis world in its earliest stage. In what sense is the *Iliad* about a 'heroic society' existing in a particular place at a particular time? Many scholars believe that, despite certain distortions due to poetic licence, the *Iliad* is a reliable description of a heroic society. A. W. H. Adkins in particular has provided elaborate analyses of the value system of Homeric heroic society, but his hypotheses have not gone unchallenged by philosophers (Long) or historians (Snodgrass). It is unquestionably true that the characters of the *Iliad* for the most part observe a warrior code that can be found in many real societies. Courage, physical strength, loyalty to friends and kinsmen, revenge, and hospitality to strangers are important elements of this code. It is an aristocratic code, and there is no reason to doubt that some version of it governed the lives of the landowners who were the dominant part of Homer's audience. But it is one thing to say that the upper strata of Homer's audience lived according to a warrior code and another to claim that they formed the heroic society of which the *Iliad* is a description. Greek has given us the useful word 'pornography' (writing about whores). One might coin the analogue 'hero-graphy' and capture an essential aspect of heroic poetry: it is never a description but always a fiction of desire, born out of a fascination with, yearning for and revulsion at physical violence.

The modern reader, by which I mean the reader since the eighteenth century, has typically approached the *Iliad* from a perspective of nostalgic inferiority. The characters and actions of the *Iliad* breathe a fullness and simple strength that he lacks, and he mourns the loss of the glamorous

world that produced such glamorous poetry. But there never was a world of heroic glamour to correspond to its poetic image. The *Iliad* is a heroic vision of force, but 'heroic' is an adjective in the past tense. To the poet of the *Iliad* the present is inferior to an image of the past endowed with greater fullness. Men like Hektor or Aias, let alone Achilles, no longer exist. Three times he tells us that it would take two modern men to hoist the stones his heroes lift with ease (5.303, 12.447, 20.286). And even the characters in the poem share in this regression towards a fuller past: in the first book Nestor in the presence of Agamemnon and Achilles reminisces about a time when he fought with men the like of which he will not see again (1.262). G. S. Kirk (1962, 135–8), has argued persuasively that the impoverished material conditions following the collapse of Mycenaean culture were a particularly rich breeding-ground for the heroic tradition of which Homer is the culmination. But ultimately the heroic vision is the product of the more radical and metaphysical poverty that is the subject of meditation in Wallace Stevens's 'Esthétique du mal':

> Natives of poverty, children of malheur,
> The gaiety of language is our seigneur.

Homer, his contemporaries and his modern readers inhabit the first line, Achilles and Hektor the second. A failure to observe that crucial distinction will ruin our understanding of the sense in which the *Iliad* may be said to be a poem 'about' heroic society.

Occasionally in the *Iliad* we catch a glimpse of a less heroic everyday world. The most striking passages of this kind are the shield of Achilles (18.478) and Nestor's narrative of his role in the war with the Epeians (11.671). The latter is a story of greed and revenge and deals with a dispute of two villages over horses and cattle. It is a three-day affair, and perhaps more than any other part of the *Iliad* it gives a sense of what warfare in the eighth century may have been like. The former is an encyclopaedic tableau of the real world, telling us about marriage, justice, war, harvesting and celebration. It is an ordinary and 'realistic' world, made radiant, but not elevated, by the skill of Hephaistos. In the *Odyssey* such glimpses are more common; in particular, Odysseus' false accounts of his adventures describe an unheroic, almost mean-spirited world. It would be quite wrong to see in such passages the traces of a more 'modern' world. Rather, they reveal the everyday world that underlies both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and they tell us a great deal about the imaginative energy that wrested from this simple and poor world the austere and splendid vision of force that inspires the *Iliad*.

We know much less about the world in and for which Homer wrote than about the world that made of his poems a kind of Scripture. Homer was 'the poet' *par excellence* in the world of the Greek city states, and the *Iliad*

and *Odyssey* were what Eric Havelock has called a 'tribal encyclopaedia', through story and example conveying information about the entire range of human affairs. Is it surprising that classical Athens looked for guidance to poems celebrating a heroic society? The question loses its point as soon as we recognise the heroic world as a vision in the past rather than an image of a once existing world. Moreover, the vision is deeply rooted in a city culture. What differentiates the *Iliad* from other heroic poems is the significance of Troy as setting and theme. It is true that Priam's palace is all we ever see inside Troy. But one need only look at the banqueting-hall in *Beowulf* to recognise that Troy is much more than an extended royal palace. The walls of Troy enclose and define a city.

Historians of Greek moral thought like Adkins have made much of the distinction between the competitive values of the warrior and the co-operative values of the citizen. The distinction is real but it should not be bridged by a theory of evolution. The warrior code retained its relevance and appeal not only in the militaristic climate of Sparta, but also in the 'softer' Athens, which took no less pride in its citizen army than in its cultural accomplishments. And the fact that the warrior code dominates the *Iliad* to the seeming exclusion of everything else reflects less a historical stage of development than the poem's unremitting concentration on the marginal situation of war.

The warrior code is less foreign to the citizen reader than some evolutionary theories suggest. A similar point can be made about the aristocratic bent of the *Iliad*. Is there not a fundamental opposition between the 'democratic spirit' of Athens and the exclusive spirit of the warrior caste in the *Iliad*? The exclusiveness is beyond question. The *Iliad* is rather like a club and bestows on its members privileges that persist in the face of grave moral shortcomings. Take Paris, a womaniser and fighter of dubious valour. Hektor is not afraid to scold him in public, but in the end even Paris remains a member in good standing and does not forfeit the privileges such standing confers. What those privileges are is made emphatically clear in the famous Thersites scene of the second book. Thersites is not a member – in fact, he is the only non-member in the *Iliad* – and he is the aristocrat's image of a perfect plebeian: an ugly loudmouth and coward. He stands up in the assembly and rails at Agamemnon. What he says is very similar to what Achilles had said, but it does not matter, for someone like him has no right to speak in the first place. His presumption must be brutally checked, and Odysseus does not hesitate to do so, first in words and then in deed:

> So he spoke and dashed the sceptre against his back and
> shoulders, and he doubled over, and a round tear dropped from him,
> and a bloody welt stood up between his shoulders under
> the golden sceptre's stroke, and he sat down again, frightened,

in pain, and looking helplessly about wiped off the tear-drops.
Sorry though the men were they laughed over him happily . . .(2.265–70)

Once the distinction between members and non-members is made, however, the *Iliad* pays no further attention to it. In this it is very unlike, say, *Don Quixote* or Shakespearian plays, in which a high–low distinction is a recurring structural element. Those who gain admission to the narrator's world form a society of peers with little internal differentiation along hierarchic lines. There is a natural hierarchy of youth and age, and there are kings and priests to whom special respect is due by virtue of their office. There is also the pecking order maintained by the warriors' continuing rivalry among themselves. None the less, it is fundamentally a society of equals with a remarkable ease and simplicity of manners. This state of affairs is mirrored on Olympus, where the gods, while mindful of the power and pre-eminence of Zeus, do not hesitate to answer back or quarrel with him.

Homer's Athenian audience was very receptive to an ethos that was exclusive and competitive but anti-hierarchic. Quite apart from the fact that the privilege of citizenship was beyond the reach of slaves and resident aliens, Athenian society was hardly egalitarian. With the great exception of Socrates, most famous Athenians came from 'good' families whose commitment to politics, inseparable from warfare, found a ready mirror in the image of the heroic world. In Athens, just as in Homer's day, the values of the upper class established the moral norms and canons of taste, even though Homer's audience was never restricted to that class. Those values and a commitment to competitive excellence governed the conception of the 'typical'. If we think of the 'typical' citizen reader as a young man of the class that produced Kimon, Miltiades, Perikles and Alkibiades, the gap between the city and the heroic world narrows considerably.

ORAL POETRY, THE *ILIAD* AND THE MODERN READER

For the Greeks, Homer was simply the Poet, and this is a role he has never lost in the Western tradition. Dante, who did not read Homer either in Greek or in translation, none the less makes him the leader of the great poets who acknowledge Dante the pilgrim as one of their own (*Inferno*, 4.86). The young Pope similarly uses Homer as the prototype of the poet. When in his *Essay on Criticism* he claimed that 'Nature and Homer were . . .the same', he expressed an age-old consensus that there was an unchanging order of things (Nature), which had found permanent expression in Homer as the greatest and most representative of poets.

The proposition that Nature and Homer are the same has also been self-evident to many readers since the late eighteenth century, but in a very

different sense. Nature here no longer means the unchanging order of things but a primordial state of simplicity from which civilised man has progressively distanced himself and to which he wishes (or thinks he wishes) to return. To read Homer is for a moment to return to the childhood of mankind. By the late eighteenth century this new version of the identity of Homer and Nature had acquired an orthodoxy of its own. Its roots, however, go back to the quarrel of the ancients and moderns in seventeenth-century France, and indeed there are many traces of it in Pope's commentary on his Homeric translations. Take his note on the scene in which Nausikaa does her laundry on the beach:

> It has been further objected, that the Poet gives an unworthy employment to *Nausicaa*, the daughter of a King; but such Critics form their idea of ancient, from modern greatness: It wou'd be now a meanness to describe a person of Quality thus employ'd, because custom has made it the work of persons of low condition: It would be now thought dishonourable for a Lady of high station to attend the flocks; yet we find in the most ancient history extant, that the daughters of *Laban* and *Jethro*, persons of power and distinction, were so employ'd, without any dishonour to their quality. In short, these passages are to be look'd upon as exact pictures of the old World, and consequently as valuable remains of Antiquity.
>
> (Note on *Odyssey*, 6.31; 6.35 in Pope's translation)

The twentieth-century reader will hear the nostalgic titillation masquerading in historicist guise: the Nature that Pope implicitly attributes to Homer and Nausikaa is different from the Nature invoked in the *Essay on Criticism*.

The view of Homer as a child of Nature is part of a wider set of Romantic theories in which poetry as a whole is seen as the original and most natural form of discourse. Such theories generated the Myth of the Two Poets, which in England found its best expression in the oppositions of Homer and Vergil and Shakespeare and Milton. The myth is a poetic version of the Fall and contrasts the self-effacing 'naïve' with the self-projecting 'sentimental' poet. Homer had four great advantages over Shakespeare as the prototype of the self-effacing poet. (1) Nothing was known about his person, and it was not even clear whether his name was a real name. Thus he was more radically anonymous than Shakespeare, whose biography was never so mysterious as it was popular to assume. (2) Tradition pictured him blind, thus depriving him of a further powerful aspect of identity. (3) While Shakespeare in the opinion of Ben Jonson had small Latin and less Greek, Homer, according to the best knowledge of eighteenth-century historians, could not write at all. (4) He was original

and spontaneous in the sense that nothing was known about his predecessors. Anonymous, blind, unlettered – what better image could there be of an original genius existing prior to the division of self and community, subject and object, thought and feeling, thing and meaning, concrete and abstract, or whatever other oppositions have been used to illustrate this particular ideological construct?

The view of Homer as an unlettered poet powerfully shaped the development of Homeric scholarship. From the *Prolegomena* of Friedrich Wolf to Wilamowitz's *Die Ilias und Homer* it spurred the tradition of analytical criticism in which the *Iliad* as we now have it was considered a late job of putting together different and much shorter poems, some of which were the work of Homer, the prototype of naïve genius. Nineteenth-century scholars were also familiar with the notion that the Homeric poems rested on a broad tradition of narrative conventions, that these conventions were the function of a preliterate society, and that the individual poet's art was steeped in his tradition to the point of disappearing behind it. But until the early twentieth century there was no systematic effort to describe those conventions in detail and to relate them to the conditions of the poet in a preliterate society. That achievement was the work of Milman Parry, who not only made a systematic study of the oral features of Homeric poetry but also gave to the study of oral poetry a programme and a method. Parry's work was continued by Albert Lord, who in 1960 published his *The Singer of Tales*, an anatomy of oral poetry that is based on Homeric and Serbo-Croatian heroic poetry but claims validity for all oral poetry. (J. A. Davison and Adam Parry in his long introduction to Milman Parry's *The Making of Homeric Verse* have given the best accounts in English of the history of theories about multiple authorship and oral composition in the Homeric poems.)

The Parry–Lord theory of oral poetry, for all its wealth of empirical observation, cannot deny its derivation from the Myth of the Two Poets. Oral poetry, on this view, is far more than poetry produced, performed and transmitted without the aid of writing. It is the expression of a distinct mental set radically opposed at all levels to the world of literacy. The dogmas of the theory may be stated as follows:

(1) The oral poet has no 'style' of his own – the very word betrays its origin in a literary culture. He composes with the aid of a stock of formulas inherited from the tradition.
(2) The oral poem is formulaic at every level of organisation. Stock phrases are combined into sentences; stock themes into larger narrative units, etc.
(3) The oral poet improvises, and there is no distinction between the acts of composition and performance. The concepts of a fixed text and of

individual authorship, fundamental to a literate culture, make no sense in an oral context in which singer, tale and audience are merged in a communal tradition.

(4) An oral tradition cannot survive the advent of literacy.

From these principles one can deduce two additional methodological rules:

(5) The 'reader' of oral poetry must unlearn the habits of literacy if he wants fully to enter into the spirit of oral poetry.

(6) If you prove that a poem is oral at one level of organisation, you must read it as an oral poem at all levels of organisation.

The rigid application of these principles to the Homeric poems has always confronted critics with the dilemma of having to acknowledge the unquestionably oral nature of Homeric verse at the cost of rejecting many perceived qualities of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as figments of a literary imagination. Ruth Finnegan has therefore done Homeric scholarship a great service by proving that the Parry–Lord theory in its rigid form is a myth that does not fit the facts. She surveyed a wide range of oral literature differing in genre, social function and geographical origin and demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that it is impossible to identify a set of traits common to all oral literature. In some cultures, oral poems are a collective possession, but others have a distinct notion of individual authorship. Performance and composition often coincide, as they do in Serbo-Croatian poetry, but there is ample evidence for oral poems that are premeditated and recited on separate occasions, whether by the author or by someone else. There is considerable variety with regard to verbatim transmission. Above all, Finnegan showed that the relationship of oral to literate traditions is extremely flexible and that many oral traditions have co-existed with literacy and made use of it. The conclusion of her research is that the internal variety of oral traditions and the great flexibility of their relationship to literacy rule out arguments from analogy. To say of a work that it is oral is to make a statement about its dominant mode of production and/or transmission. Such a statement of itself says nothing about the organisation, complexity and spirit of a text so produced or transmitted. The proof that a poem is like a certain kind of oral poetry in some ways does not justify the inference that it will be like that poetry in other ways. 'Oral literature' is a very broad concept with little explanatory power.

For the student of Homer, Finnegan's demonstration of what oral poetry is and is not has a wonderfully liberating effect. He no longer knows in advance what kind of composition the *Iliad* is or what rhetorical effects are possible in it. He must listen to the text in order to find out and, as Aristarchus preached, he must explain Homer out of Homer. Of course he may use analogies, both from oral and from written poetry. Some will

be more appropriate than others, but none has privileged status or power of proof. In short, the student of Homer must have the virtues of a good reader. It is a curious reflection on Homeric scholarship that so obvious a statement still stands in need of justification.

In addition to Finnegan's demonstration of the extreme diversity of oral literature, there are two general arguments that bear on the oral/literate distinction and its application to Homeric poetry. The first concerns the hypothesis that formulaic poetry is formulaic at all levels and that at all levels there is a sharp distinction between oral and literate poetry. This hypothesis is false because it ignores the varying character and force of rules at different levels of discourse. In any language the rules that govern the combination of phonemes are rigidly observed. By comparison rules of syntax are very flexible, but they in turn appear rigid if looked at from the perspective of rules that govern the combination of sentences, for these 'rules of discourse' are so flexible and so sensitive to social and generic contexts as well as to individual preference that they can hardly be formulated at all except with the proviso 'unless the situation demands otherwise'. Both oral and literate poetry are forms of discourse and thus subject to the increasingly discretionary character of rules at ascending levels of organisation. If, as happens to be the case, we can attribute to Homer a form of versemaking that is rooted in an oral tradition and differs characteristically from the procedures of many writers, it does not follow that the rules of Homeric discourse observe an oral/literate distinction with equal force. On the contrary, we may expect from the outset that at the level of discourse the particular variables of context, ability and preference will outweigh general rules. The failure of various attempts to create an oral poetics is not an accident but testifies to the fact that beyond the level of sentence/verse the common elements in the systems of conventions governing discourse (including their extreme variability) will far outweigh the force of an oral/literate distinction.

The point is well illustrated by comparing the rhetorical strategies used to achieve variety in two passages of catalogue poetry. The first passage occurs in Wallace Stevens's 'Sunday Morning':

> Divinity must live within herself:
> Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
> Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
> Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
> Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
> All pleasures and all pains, remembering
> The bough of summer and the winter branch.

This catalogue balances a number of items: 'passions' against 'moods', 'grievings' against 'elations', 'pleasures' against 'pains', the 'bough' against

the 'branch'. Variety enters through the avoidance of precise symmetry. 'Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow' does not divide right in the middle, and the qualifying phrases are attached to the governing nouns in slightly different ways ('of', 'in'). The second pair in the catalogue ('Grievings . . . blooms') is almost twice as long; the metrical imbalance, emphasised by the strong enjambment, is more pronounced, and the syntactical differentiation of the balancing clauses is greater as well. In the next item ('gusty . . . nights') balance is abandoned, as the structure of the phrase mirrors its wind-tossed content, but the return to virtual symmetry becomes the source of special effect in the following item ('All pleasures and all pains'). This phrase, however, does not occupy the entire line, and in the final item variety returns with the subtle differentiation of the 'bough of summer' and the 'winter branch'.

Nobody would quarrel with this description of the rhetorical tricks employed by an exceptionally artful twentieth-century poet. But now look at the following passage from the *Iliad*:

> Αἴας ῥα πρῶτος Τελαμώνιος Ὕρτιον οὖτα
> Γυρτιάδην Μυσῶν ἡγήτορα καρτεροθύμων·
> Φάλκην δ' Ἀντίλοχος καὶ Μέρμερον ἐξενάριξε·
> Μηριόνης δὲ Μόρυν τε καὶ Ἱπποτίωνα κατέκτα,
> Τεῦκρος δὲ Προθόωνά τ' ἐνήρατο καὶ Περιφήτην·
> Ἀτρεΐδης δ' ἄρ' ἔπειθ' Ὑπερήνορα ποιμένα λαῶν
> οὖτα κατὰ λαπάρην, διὰ δ' ἔντερα χαλκὸς ἄφυσσε
> δηιώσας· ψυχὴ δὲ κατ' οὐταμένην ὠτειλὴν
> ἔσσυτ' ἐπειγομένη, τὸν δὲ σκότος ὄσσε κάλυψε.
> πλείστους δ' Αἴας εἷλεν Ὀϊλῆος ταχὺς υἱός·
> οὐ γάρ οἵ τις ὁμοῖος ἐπισπέσθαι ποσὶν ἦεν
> ἀνδρῶν τρεσσάντων, ὅτε τε Ζεὺς ἐν φόβον ὄρση.

First Telamonian Aias cut down Hyrtios, he who
was son to Gyrtios, and lord over the strong-hearted Mysians.
Antilochos slaughtered Phalkes and Mermeros. Morys
and Hippotion were killed by Meriones. Teukros cut down
Periphetes and Prothoön. Next the son of Atreus,
Menelaos, stabbed Hyperenor, shepherd of the people,
in the flank, so the bronze head let gush out the entrails
through the torn side. His life came out through the wound of the spearstab
in beating haste, and a mist of darkness closed over both eyes.
But Aias the fast-footed son of Oïleus caught and killed most,
since there was none like him in the speed of his feet to go after
men who ran, once Zeus had driven the terror upon them. (14.511–22)

As with Stevens's catalogue, the passage uses a number of devices to avoid rigid symmetry. A two-line account of the victim of the greater Aias is followed by three one-line killings in each of which an Achaean kills two

Trojans. The word for 'killed' is different each time (*exenarixe, katekta, enērato*) and the word order differs in the arrangement of subject, verb and the two objects (OSOV, SOOV, SOVO) so that in the three lines no part of speech appears more than twice in the same position in the sentence. The three short killings are followed by four lines describing Menelaos' victory over Hyperenor. The lesser Aias brings up the rear and is responsible for an indefinite number of killings. The passage begins with one Aias and ends with another.

I do not want to argue that the Homeric lines, a bread-and-butter passage from a 16,000-line poem, are a rival in subtlety or complexity to a central passage in a great lyric of 120 lines. The point is rather that there is no significant difference between the rhetorical devices employed by the two passages and that in 'reading' and describing the passages one must use very much the same analytical tools. To accept this conclusion is not to deny that Homer was oral; it is simply to recognise that at the level of discourse there is no sharp distinction between 'oral' and 'literate' composition.

A second general consideration is based on the equivocation oral/aural. To base canons of interpretation on the capabilities of an audience and to define limits in terms of what can be heard seems much more plausible than to derive such canons and limits from the circumstances of composition, since nothing prevents us from attributing prodigious powers to an individual composer. On the other hand, Homer's audience must have been much like ourselves in general ability, except that engrained dependence on the written word had not atrophied their memory and listening ability. Thus we can make a reasonably informed guess about the collective ability of Homer's audience. But if we base canons of interpretation on the putative ability of such an audience we run up against the awkward fact that its aural character does not distinguish it radically from the audiences of such unquestionably literate writers as Sophocles or Vergil. The truth is that the dominant form of reception for all ancient literature was aural. Our notion of 'reading' is shaped by the technology of book production. But the modern form of the book, the codex consisting of leaves that are sewn together and permit direct access to any part of a text in any order, is an invention of late antiquity. Prior to the codex, readers followed a scroll, a cumbersome process that greatly restricted the freedom to move within a text. Add to this the difficulty of duplication and the resulting scarcity of texts and you have a culture that puts a high premium on the listener's ability to grasp and retain a text with as little recourse to written documents as possible. It is a reasonable assumption that a poet's work will be shaped by his sense of what an attentive audience can comprehend (though not necessarily at a first hearing). But, given the aural nature of classical culture, we cannot use this assumption to posit a radical difference between the audiences of Homer and Sophocles. Because

aurality straddles the oral/literate divide we cannot use the facts of recitation and aural reception to posit canons of interpretation that differentiate the criticism of the *Iliad* from that of the *Oresteia* or *Oedipus Rex*. Because of the oral/aural equivocation I have freely and deliberately used the word 'reader' as the singular form of 'audience' whenever dealing with questions of response to the text of the *Iliad*. Modern audiences read the poem, ancient audiences listened to it. The difference is not trivial, and the modern reader must keep it in mind. But, whether audiences read the *Iliad* or listen to it, they must construe and respond to the meaning of the words, and this act of making sense may justly be called 'reading'.

The fact of recitation does, however, raise a serious problem when we consider the length of the *Iliad*. Assuming an average speed of ten lines a minute, a continuous recitation of the poem's 15,693 lines would last about twenty-six hours. A complete performance of the *Iliad*, therefore, takes at least three days. Such performances can be traced back as far as the Panathenaean festivals of the sixth century, and the possibility of a complete performance, however special the occasion, must have been in the poet's mind. But it is equally clear that most listeners got to know the *Iliad* in bits and pieces and many never heard it from beginning to end at all.

It follows from these conditions that the poet had to think in narrative units that could be detached and would be intelligible and reasonably self-contained in recitation. The episodic nature of Homeric narrative amply meets this requirement: the Quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles, the Duel of Menelaos and Paris, Hektor in Troy, the Embassy, etc., all are intelligible units of narrative for a listener who has a general knowledge of the Trojan War. But how did the poet create a sense of a whole in a narrative that his listeners would for the most part encounter piecemeal? Roughly speaking, the poet had a choice between two strategies. He could think of his work as a kind of encyclopaedia, in which case all he had to do was to find some way of arranging a set of quasi-autonomous songs in a plausible sequence. If, on the other hand, he thought of his work as an integrated whole, he had to shape his episodes in such a manner that the elements of unification would reside in the structure of the episodes rather than in their connection, since the connections would be absent from most performances. The choice, it cannot be emphasised too strongly, was Homer's, and the evidence is in the text. His tradition was no guide to him in this regard, nor is our knowledge of heroic poetry in general of much use in determining which of these strategies he did choose.

THE HOMERIC FORMULA AND ITS LIMITS

Once we have shed the notion of Homer as the Oral Poet with all the ideological baggage that goes with it, we are free to return to the *Iliad* as a

poem that shows strong traces of oral versemaking. We will expect that the procedures of versemaking bear significantly on other elements of the narrative, but in analysing the relationship of versemaking to other forms of narrative organisation we will not be swayed by notions of what is typical or possible in oral poetry.

The Homeric formula is inextricably linked to the hexameter. Whether the hexameter created the formula or the other way round is a moot question, but fortunately it is irrelevant to an analysis of poetic practice within an existing system of formulaic hexametric composition. For our purposes it is sufficient to have a rough description of the Homeric hexameter, focusing on those aspects that are important to the conduct of narrative. (See Fränkel, 1968, Kirk, 1966, and Ingalls for more detailed discussions.)

Ancient Greek verse is based on quantitative principles. Whereas in English poetry rhythm is established by a sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables, Greek poetry 'measures' the duration of syllables and establishes patterns through recurring sequences of long and short syllables. For metrical purposes a syllable is either long or short, and a long syllable is the equivalent of two short syllables. (I ignore here the elaborate conventions that determine whether a syllable counts as long or short.) The 'foot' of a Greek metre is like the bar of a musical composition in that it is a measure of time and its sub-units are related to each other in strict mathematical proportion. It is unlike a bar in that the only permissible proportion is 2:1 and the sequence of units is much more strictly regulated. The dactylic hexameter, the metre of Homeric and all subsequent Greek narrative poetry, may be described in musical terms as a six-bar phrase in *alla breve* time with the following restrictions:

(1) The basic rhythm, the dactyl, ♩♪♪ or – ∨ ∨ in prosodic notation, permits only the spondee, 𝅗𝅥𝅗𝅥 or – –, as a substitution.
(2) This substitution may occur in any bar, but no verse may consist of six successive spondees.
(3) The final bar is always counted – – regardless of the length of the final syllable.
(4) The penultimate bar is usually – ∨ ∨

From (3) and (4) it follows that the hexameter has the typical cadence – ∨ ∨ – –, with the penultimate bar asserting the basic rhythm and the final bar establishing closure and separating the end of one line from the beginning of the next.

I use musical terminology partly for its precision, partly because the hexameter was originally sung or chanted, and partly to stress the fundamental difference between the Greek and English hexameter. Conversion of the quantitatively based hexameter into its stress-based English

counterpart produces a rhythm in triple time with a strong down-beat: ♩♩♩. The lilting and waltz-like quality of the English hexameter not only disqualifies it for translating purposes, but also blocks an appreciation of the stately rhythmic qualities of the original metre (Beethoven-lovers may think of the theme of the *andante* in the Seventh Symphony as a hexametric cadence thrice repeated).

From the perspective of formulaic composition the most important thing about the Homeric hexameter is the strong patterning it shows in the relation of prosodic to syntactic structures. Versification introduces an additional set of constraints into language. The poetic sentence, in addition to satisfying phonological, morphological and syntactic rules, must observe prosodic rules as well. Prosodic rules operate at the syntactic level, and its units are of comparable magnitude: a foot corresponds (roughly) to a word, and a line corresponds (roughly) to a sentence. The structure of verse is crucially affected by the manner in which the division of the sentence into words relates to the division of the line into feet. If the end of a foot corresponds to the end of a word, two principles of organisation reinforce one another and establish symmetry and closure. If word end occurs within a foot, there is an effect of discontinuity, however slight. A line in which word end continuously reinforces prosodic divisions will be monotonous; a line in which word end clashes with prosodic division at every point may cease to be metrically intelligible. Poetic skill in any language and any metre will depend heavily on establishing a sense of order, variety, pace and tension through managing the relationship of syntactic and prosodic divisions.

In the Homeric hexameter this relationship is governed by strict conventions about the placement of word end within a foot (caesura) or at the end of a foot (diaeresis). One may predict on the strength of general principle that the hexameter avoids diaeresis at the end of the third foot or sixth element (each foot consists of two elements of equal duration), because word end at this point divides the line into equal parts and leaves it unresolved whether there are two trimeters or two halves of a hexameter. But the hexameter is a long line – longer by a third than the iambic trimeter, which corresponds to blank verse in length and uses – and it stands in need of subdivision to be intelligible. Virtually all hexameters are divided into two slightly asymmetrical halves, either after the fifth element (strong or penthemimeral caesura) or in the sixth element (feminine or trochaic caesura):

mēnin aeide thea | *Pēlēiadeō Achilēos*
– ∨∨ – ∨∨ – – – ∨∨ – ∨ ∨ – –

andra moi ennepe Mousa | *polutropon hos mala polla*
– ∨ ∨ – ∨∨ – ∨ ∨ – ∨∨ – ∨ ∨ – –

If diaeresis never occurs after the third foot, it is strongly favoured after the fourth foot, where it is called the 'bucolic diaeresis' and serves to set off the final cadence:

andra moi ennepe Mousa polutropon | *hos mala polla*
– ∪ ∪ – ∪∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪∪ – –

The division established by the main caesura tends to be repeated in both parts, but the localisation of divisions at favoured positions is much more strongly articulated in the second half than in the first. Thus in the first line of the *Odyssey* the feminine caesura and the bucolic diaeresis yield a second half divided as follows:

polutropon hos mala polla

In the second half of the opening line of the *Iliad*, *Pēlēiadeō Achilēos*, we may either treat the phrase as a single word or posit a caesura at the comparatively rare position after the ninth element (8.8 per cent as opposed to 60 per cent for the bucolic diaeresis). On either assumption, the unusual division is caused by the presence of what Hermann Fränkel (1968) has called a 'heavy word', a word that by its length and metrical shape leads to the disappearance or dislocation of expected divisions.

The unit created by such divisions is called 'colon'. A colon is a hybrid that observes both prosodic and syntactic rules and stands between the lower level of words and feet and the higher level of sentences and lines. Of course a particular colon may be a complete word or sentence, but this fact does not in the least undermine its status as a hybrid and intermediate entity, observing two sets of rules and standing between two levels of organisation.

The colon is the main unit of hexametric composition. The poet does not fit words into feet, but cola into lines. The hexameter is for him a unit to be built from two, three or four of these syntacto-prosodic modules. In moving from one position to the next – from, say, the main caesura to the bucolic diaeresis – he has at his disposal both a stock of ready-made phrases and the ability to coin new phrases according to the required syntactic and prosodic patterns.

What I have said so far is true of the hexameter at any period, whether oral or literate, and *mutatis mutandis* it applies to other forms of heavily stylised poetry, such as the heroic couplet of the Augustan poets. We must now turn to those elements of Homer's versification that have led scholars to the conclusion that he relied on a technique of oral versemaking. It is a striking feature of Greek literature that each literary genre has its own 'language', which is based on a regional dialect and employed by all writers

of that genre regardless of their origin. In the mixed form of tragedy, for instance, the spoken verse is composed in the Attic sub-dialect of Ionian, but the choral parts are in Dorian, because Dorian is the language of the choral lyric. Among these literary dialects, the language of epic is unique for being a thorough mixture of chronologically and regionally distinct origins. While Homer's language is mainly Ionian, it contains a strong Aeolian component. It also contains forms and words that may be Mycenaean and certainly antedate the division of dialects in Homer's day. While this mixture provides an extraordinary variety of alternatives, semantically and syntactically equivalent variants tend to be metrically distinct. Students of this phenomenon early in the twentieth century concluded on the basis of very detailed observations that Homer's language was a *Kunstsprache*, an instrument developed in the course of several centuries for the purpose of creating hexametric verse.

To associate these findings explicitly and systematically with oral composition was the work of the American scholar Milman Parry. His work is based on philological observation of a slightly different kind. It has always been a commonplace of criticism that the Homeric poems differ significantly from later poetry in their use of adjectives. According to standard rhetorical theory the proper function of the adjective is to specify, embellish or otherwise colour the use of a noun in a manner that is relevant to the individual context. An adjective that does not achieve the goal of variety and precision should be deleted. To this day teachers of prose composition scrutinise their students' essays for redundancy, repetition or lack of specificity in the use of adjectives. Homer violates all rules of the adjective. His characters, as well as frequent nouns such as 'ship', 'horse', 'shield', 'men', carry adjectives that are freely repeated without any regard for the uniqueness of the situation. Any warrior can be *dios*, 'godlike', and the word does not imply any special brilliance on the occasion of its use. Menelaos and Diomedes are *boēn agathos*, 'good at shouting', whether or not their voices are in demand. Some adjectives are the unique property of a particular warrior. Among mortals only Achilles is *podas ōkus*, 'swift-footed' (the messenger goddess Iris is *podas ōkea*), but the use of this epithet is not governed by any special relevance of swiftness to the narrative context. There are also quite a few etymologically opaque adjectives that occur in highly restricted contexts, modifying one noun or a few semantically similar nouns. We do not really know what these words mean, but it is quite likely that Homer did not know, either, and the contexts in which such words appear do little to specify their meaning. Then again there are adjectives that seem downright inappropriate to their context. The most famous case for a long time was *amumōn*, which carries a vaguely approving meaning and has usually been translated as 'blameless', following an ancient etymological derivation from *mōmos* ('blame'). But *amumōn* is used of Aegisthus and the suitors, who are as

blameworthy as anyone in the Homeric epics. This puzzle may have been solved by Anne Amory Parry, who challenged the traditional meaning and argued that it rather means 'handsome'. But other cases remain. If we are familiar with a warrior doing something *cheiri pacheiēi*, 'with his thick hand', does the adjective fit Penelope when she opens the cellar door to fetch the bow of Odysseus (*Odyssey*, 21.6)?

Building on the work of earlier scholars, Milman Parry was the first to provide a systematic explanation of the Homeric use of the adjective. He saw that the recurring combinations of noun and epithet establish syntacto-prosodic units of the kind we described in the discussion of the hexameter and that they were mainly designed to fill the final part of the hexameter. He called such units 'formulas' and demonstrated that their systematic and pervasive presence in the poems was based on the joint principles of extension and economy. To take an example: the poet must frequently refer to Achilles in the nominative, and somewhat less frequently in the genitive case. The rules of the hexameter require that these references occur predominantly in the second half of the verse and that they take one of several metrical shapes. Because the name satisfies only one metrical contingency, the poet makes up for this shortage by combining it with various adjectives and thus creates a set of modular units. In the nominative Parry (p. 39) counts four principal types and finds that a name phrase for Achilles occurs in three of them:

after the bucolic diaeresis:	*dios Achilleus* (× 34) ('brilliant')
	ōkus Achilleus (× 5) ('swift')
after the caesura in the fourth foot (hepthemimeral):	*podas ōkus Achilleus* (× 31) ('swift-footed')
	megathumos Achilleus (× 1) ('great-hearted')
after the feminine caesura:	*podarkēs dios Achilleus* (× 21) ('swift-footed brilliant')

The variants *dios* and *ōkus* are metrically distinct because of the quality of the initial sound. Unlike Odysseus, Athene, Zeus and Hektor, Achilles has no formula for the beginning of the line, but this type is much less frequent, accounting for no more than eight occurrences of the name of any character.

In the genitive Parry (p. 57) posits three principal types and finds that name phrases for Achilles occur in two of them: after the feminine caesura, *Achillēos theioio* (× 2), and after the penthemimeral caesura, *Pēlēiadeō Achilēos*. Again there is no phrase for the less common use of the genitive at the beginning of the line.

Parry discovered that the system of formulaic name phrases satisfied the

principle of extension in that it provided a syntacto-prosodic unit to refer to every major character in virtually every metrical condition. But he also discovered that with hardly any exceptions there was only one phrase for every possible type. This he called the principle of economy. Parry argued that the creation of a system marked by extension and economy was beyond the scope of an individual but that it was the collective work of generations of oral poets in whose work improvisation played a crucial role and of whose procedures the descriptions of professional singers in the *Odyssey* give us some idea.

Parry was unquestionably right in his demonstration that Homeric poetry rests on a basis of oral versemaking. But because of the elegance and cogency of his proof it is essential to distinguish clearly between what he did prove and the much more questionable inferences he and his followers drew from his proof. The distinction is neatly summarised by the titles of two famous books. Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* proclaims in its title the programme of a unified theory of oral poetry based on formulaic composition at all levels. The enthusiasm of Milman Parry for such a theory is quite evident from his work on Serbo-Croatian poetry. Indeed, the title of Lord's book is that of Parry's unfinished work (Parry, xxxix). But when Adam Parry in 1971 published his father's collected papers he gave them the deliberately modest title *The Making of Homeric Verse* so as to draw attention to those areas in which his father's work had established conclusive proof.

The most obvious target for a criticism of Parry is his polemics against the semantic function of the epithet. He was from the beginning strongly attracted to Romantic notions of Greece as an image of naïve perfection not yet cursed by individuation. In the final sentence of his MA thesis the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are described as works in which 'the genius of the artist has blended with that of his race so inextricably that the two are hard to distinguish: they can only be realized in the perfection of the result' (Parry, 431). In the same work the progressive individuality of the post-Homeric hymns strikes him as the cause of their poetic Fall: 'The later poems are graceful, charming, but they have not the greatness of the earlier hymn, which, losing nothing in grace or charm, has added to them a grave reverence and a spirit of universality . . . The later hymns have allowed a definite impress of personality to creep in' (p. 430). Parry's romanticism led him to posit a needless dichotomy between the semantic and metrical functions of the epithet. It was his position that, since the choice between two noun epithet phrases was metrically conditioned, the meaning of the epithet was irrelevant:

> An epithet is not ornamental in itself, whatever may be its signification: it is only by dint of being used over and again with a certain substantive or group of substantives that it acquires this quality. It becomes

> ornamental when *its meaning loses any value of its own* and becomes so involved with the idea of its substantive that the two can no longer be separated. The fixed epithet then adds to the combination of substantive and epithet *an element of nobility and grandeur, but no more than that*. Its sole effect is to form, with its substantive, a heroic expression of the idea of that substantive. As he grows aware of this, *the reader acquires an insensibility to any particularized meaning of the epithet, and this insensibility becomes an integral part of his understanding of Homeric style*. (Parry, 127; my italics)

These words, published in 1928, form a strange counterpoint to the then fashionable aesthetics of Russian formalism with its concept of estrangement and de-automatisation as principles of poetic language. One may also think of Eliot's fascination with the colloquial precision of Dante and Donne or Pound's *Make It New* and his Hugh Selwyn Mauberley whose 'true Penelope was Flaubert', patron saint of the *mot juste*. Against this background of a poetics celebrating the uniquely expressive power of the adjective, Parry developed an aesthetics of the adjective as heroic muzak, and he used his discovery of a formulaic system as evidence of its truth. Moreover, the enormous difference in the use of adjectives was proof for him of the radical gap between collective oral poetry on the one hand and individual written poetry on the other.

But, granting the inherited nature of noun-epithet phrases and the role of metrical convenience in their use, it does not follow that an epithet never has a context-specific function. Parry's model assumes a poet composing a line until he comes to a point at which he can only say *dios Achilleus*, even if in the context *podas ōkus* might be more appropriate. But what keeps us from imagining a poet who wants to use *podas ōkus* and manipulates his verse so that he can (or 'has to') use it when the sentence calls for the name phrase? Since there is considerable differentiation between name phrases with regard both to meaning and to weight, there is no reason to deny to an oral composer a skill or interest in choosing between his formulas on semantic as well as on metrical grounds. Norman Austin has shown for the *Odyssey* that the use of epithets for different characters is surprisingly context-bound.

In fairness to Parry, it should be said that such a modification of his extreme view does not undermine his fundamental insight that Homeric epithets do function very differently from the adjectives of other poets. The frequent use of *podas ōkus* for Achilles is much more important to the effect of the poem than its context-specific use on any one occasion. Context-specific uses exist against the background of epithets whose major function is to reinforce the listener's sense that he is in the presence of heroic poetry. Sometimes Homer nods, and metrical convenience violates decorum, as with the thick hand of Penelope.

Much more serious questions about Homeric style are raised by the question whether the system of name phrases (including noun-epithet combinations for common objects) proves that other areas of diction are controlled with similar rigour. Parry believed that he had only discovered the tip of the iceberg and that subsequent research would uncover the ubiquity of formulaic diction in the Homeric poems. In one of his essays he printed the first twenty-five verses of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, underlining some thirty phrases in each poem that were repeated elsewhere, on the assumption that all such phrases were formulaic but that the corpus of Homeric poetry was not large enough to provide as conclusive a set of instances as with the system of name phrases (Parry, 301–7). But subsequent scholars have not produced evidence of formula systems characterised by anything like the same rigour of extension and economy. The reason is that what Parry discovered was not the tip of the iceberg but a limited aspect of Homeric diction, which produces highly characteristic effects but must not be confused with the generative principles of Homeric verse as such.

The system of name phrases has a very restricted field of application. A high percentage of such phrases occurs in lines marking the beginning and end of speeches. These lines are very prominent: ask a casual reader of Homer to quote a typical line, and he is likely to come up with something like *ton d' apameibomenos prosephē podas ōkus Achilleus* ('answering him, swift-footed Achilles said'). Such lines are rigidly conventional and highly predictable. So, for that matter, are the phrases with which we begin and end conversations, or, to take another example, the cadences of baroque music. We may expect in any form of discourse or composition rigidly stylised elements that create points of predictable articulation and frame a middle that may not be muddled but is certainly subject to much more fluid principles of organisation. It is essential to an understanding of Homeric narrative that the formulaic system discovered by Parry is within the conventions of that narrative a particularly fixed element, operating in restricted contexts and designed to establish points of stability. A clear recognition of this fact will help in limiting the range of inferences that can be drawn from the formula system. Parry used his demonstration to posit a radical dividing-line between oral and literate composition. It is indeed true that when the poet makes up a line like *ton d' apameibomenos prosephē podas ōkus Achilleus* he operates at a maximum distance from the situation of the literate poet crossing out an adjective and substituting another one that will shade his meaning more precisely. But it is far from clear that the rigid predictability of composition at that point extends equally over the entire field of narrative.

Let us take a famous example. When Helen says to Priam that she cannot see her brothers among the Achaean warriors, the poet comments:

hōs phato. tous d'ēdē katechen phusizoos aia
en Lakedaimoni authi philēi en patridi gaiēi. (3.243–4)

So she spoke, but the teeming earth lay already upon them
away in Lakedaimon, the beloved land of their fathers.

Ruskin commented: 'The poet has to speak of the earth in sadness; but he will not let that sadness affect or change his thought of it. No: though Castor and Pollux be dead, yet the earth is our mother still – fruitful, life-giving.' Matthew Arnold (p. 102) made fun of Ruskin's comment as an instance of a modern and sentimental criticism that has lost sight of Homer's simplicity. Parry (p. 125) echoes Arnold when he quotes Ruskin scornfully and argues that his discovery has ruled such criticism out of court. For him *phusizoos aia* is a formula like *polumētis Odusseus* or *podas ōkus Achilleus*, and to inquire into its meaning or special appropriateness is mere foolishness. But is it? Consider the facts. *Phusizoos* appears once more in the Iliad, again as a modifier of earth, but in a different phrase: *gē phusizoos* (21.63). It also recurs in the *Odyssey* in a passage that refers to Kastor and Polydeukes and can be safely established as a copy of the Iliadic line rather than an independent formulaic occurrence. The phrase *phusizoos aia* is not attested with a frequency that compels us to classify it as a formula, and the fact that it fills the space from the hepthemimeral caesura to the end of the line proves nothing, for composition in cola is a condition of hexametric composition, formulaic or otherwise. If we look more closely at the passage, we find good reasons to support the argument that it aims at a special effect of the kind Ruskin described. The lines about Kastor and Polydeukes are very like the necrologues on fallen warriors, which are often suffused with irony and compassion. Moreover, the lines counterpoint the fate of Helen with that of her brothers: she is alive, although in exile and misery; they are dead, but buried in their own country. To be alive and happy in one's own country is a destiny denied to the progeny of Leda. Such is the fate of those on whom the gods bestow beauty and attention. *Phusizoos aia* resonates strongly in this context, just as the fate of Helen and her brothers resonates in the context of the fate of Achilles. It strains probability to assume that such resonances are the by-product of a process of composition dictated by metrical convenience.

The example demonstrates how important it is not to substitute a dichotomy of formulaic and non-formulaic discourse for the continuum of a poetic language subject to rules of varying strictness. At the extreme, there is a rigidly determined system of noun phrases that allows the poet little leeway but enables any fool to turn out at least some Homeric lines. But as soon as one moves away from those fixed points the rules are more discretionary, and the incidence of fixed formulas diminishes sharply. There is good reason to assume that the compositional principles at work in the more fluid parts of the narrative cannot be described with anything

like the systematic precision Milman Parry achieved in his analysis of name phrases. By the same token, the range of possible rhetorical effects in the narrative cannot be limited by appealing to the system at its most fixed point.

The assumption of a continuum of conventions, operating with varying degrees of flexibility, resolves the false dichotomy of oral and literate stylistics and creates the basis for a proper appreciation of Homeric style. To return for a moment to *phusizoos aia*: a Homeric poetics should not set up a conflict between oral versemaking and the sense of poignancy that competent readers share in their response to this phrase in its Iliadic context. Even so fine a critic as Charles Segal still posits such a conflict when he writes that 'the unique and poignant expression, *phusizoos aia*, stands over against the formulaic *philēi en patridi gaiēi*. The special appropriateness and freshness of the former phrase heighten the tragic factuality and stern inflexibility of the latter, and *vice versa*' (Segal, 4). Perhaps he is right, but the poignancy of the passage does not depend on *phusizoos aia* being a special coinage. *Phusizoos* may well have been a typical epithet for the earth. What counts is its effective deployment in this context, which plays life and death, home and abroad against each other in a haunting fashion. Indeed, the passage has its greatest effect if we assume that *phusizoos aia* is in itself a familiar phrase but that its potential is activated by its placement in this context.

As we move beyond the phrase to the sentence, the paragraph and larger narrative units, we find that conventional elements become less fixed and the rules for their combination more flexible. We have already seen in the comparison of Homer's and Stevens's catalogues that there is no gulf between oral and literate rhetoric. Of course, the rootedness of Homeric art in oral versemaking shows up at superior levels of organisation. Every reader of Homer remembers recurring typical scenes. Walter Arend has classified and compared them in a very fine monograph, roughly contemporary with Parry's work on the formula. He begins with scenes of arrival by visitors, messengers and dreams. There is a chapter on sacrifices and meals, another on journeys by land and sea. Arming and dressing receive special attention, as do sleep, deliberation, assemblies, oaths and baths. What emerges from the survey confirms the reader's sense that Homeric narrative displays rather than conceals its conventional elements. The stock situation requires no disguise to gain admission into epic narrative, which delights in repetition. In this regard the *Iliad* is much more like comedy than like later epics.

The abundance of recurring scenes and narrative motifs is clearly related to the prevalence of noun–epithet formulas. Both reinforce our sense that tolerance of repetition is a defining feature of Homeric style. It is also clear that the availability of stock themes is helpful to an oral composer and that one can hardly imagine oral narrative without it. But Homer's reliance

on such conventions is no proof that his narrative is formulaic in a special sense that is radically different from, say, a rhetorician's use of topoi or the use of narrative conventions by such writers as Dickens or P. G. Wodehouse.

Two general points can be made about Homeric narrative conventions. First, the most obvious ones are rather like name phrases. They occur in restricted contexts and set up a framework of stability. The highly stereotyped meal descriptions, for instance, resemble each other much more closely than the business that is transacted after them. Second, and more important, the poet of the *Iliad* does not show his individuality by transforming individual conventions; instead he reveals his mastery through their deployment. It is not very difficult to dismantle the *Iliad* and classify a high percentage of its parts under a limited number of standardised modular components. The catalogue of parts, then, may suggest that the *Iliad* is the product of its conventions. But what literary critic would confuse a poem with a dictionary of its words? And yet whole branches of Homeric scholarship have flourished by turning this error into scientific procedure.

The critical question about Iliadic conventions is whether their deployment or relative degree of elaboration is governed by a narrative purpose. Take the example of Menelaos in Book 17. He is on the scene when Patroklos dies and protects his body, but when Hektor approaches he considers his choices and after much deliberation abandons the body. This is one of four such scenes in the *Iliad*, and one may construct from them a quite fixed pattern that begins with self-address, proceeds through a consideration of alternatives, marks the turning-point of the debate, and states the choice (Fenik, 1978). Each version stays quite close to the pattern so that it seems fair to say that a deliberation topos is part of the poet's inherited repertoire. But the topos is reserved for special occasions: not every retreat is preceded by elaboration. It is in the placement of the topos rather than in the elaboration of the scene that we catch the poet's special purpose on this occasion. Why is Menelaos given the dubious privilege of being the only warrior in the *Iliad* to persuade himself that retreat is honourable? And why does he show this uniquely explicit concern for self-preservation on the occasion of the death of Patroklos, which will shortly motivate Achilles to return to battle despite his full knowledge that he will lose his life? The example provides some rules of thumb on how to 'read' Homer, keeping in mind the generic meaning of the word that covers both reading and listening in their specific senses. First, one must be aware of the existence of a convention, in this case the scene of deliberation in the face of the enemy. Second, one must be aware of its distribution in the poem, and one must relate its differentiation to the contexts of its occurrences. With the boastful Hektor, his resolution to stand up to the enemy ignominiously collapses at the sight of Achilles. Odysseus, in the tradition the

most reluctant warrior to join the Achaean expedition, expresses the code of heroic resistance most fully and lives up to it even in the face of overwhelming odds. Menelaos persuades himself that preserving his own life comes before guarding the body of Patroklos. Each variation is unique in the poem and singularly appropriate to the poet's portrayal of the insecurity of Hektor, the rational courage of Odysseus, the well-meaning inadequacy of Menelaos.

Third, one must attend to the meanings created by the silent juxtaposition of related scenes. That Paris is found by Hektor in Helen's bedroom is appropriate and not surprising. That Andromache in her anxiety for Hektor has rushed to the battlements is also not unexpected. That Hektor and Andromache meet away from home against the background of Paris and Helen at home is a specifically Iliadic effect. In short, the reader of the *Iliad* must be constantly alert to the narrative strategy that controls the use of particular conventions, which in their individual elaboration may not show unusual features but gain their meaning and effect through their deployment in a particular context and through their implicit relationship to each other.

The following chapters, in which I interpret the plot of the *Iliad* and survey various narrative and thematic aspects, owe whatever merit they have to my success in applying these rules of reading. I sharply disagree with those scholars who want to derive from the status of the *Iliad* as an oral composition rules about how – or, rather, how not – to 'read' the text. On the contrary, the interpretability of the *Iliad* according to established literary canons strikes me as a cardinal fact about the poem that must govern our understanding of its origins. For this reason, I have deferred to the final chapter some speculative arguments on what circumstances and processes of composition are compatible with the structure of the poem as we have it.

My position *vis-à-vis* the oral school of Homeric scholarship of course has its own ideological foundation, which is not very far from Pope's identification of Homer with Nature in the older sense. Ben Jonson said of Shakespeare that he was for all time, thereby pointing to a defining feature of genius at its highest: its works can speak to successive and widely different ages with a peculiar ease and authority. This is as true of Dante and Shakespeare as it is of Bach and Mozart. To the immediacy of the work of genius corresponds the plurality of responses. There is no right way of playing Bach (though there are some wrong ones). Homer, whether we think of him as the author of the *Iliad* or of both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is clearly a poet for all time. This does not make him 'our contemporary', and we must pay proper attention to those aspects of his art that require historical explanation. But in the current state of Homeric criticism the proper understanding of the *Iliad* is more hampered by excessive historicism than by naïve identification. To be guided by Homer and

Nature in Pope's sense is more likely to direct our attention to those aspects of the *Iliad* that account for our continuing interest in it.

The fact that I emphasise continuity rather than discontinuities between human nature as it appears in the *Iliad* and in the modern reader has as its corollary that I also play down the differences between Homer and classical Greece, following such scholars as Lesky and Lloyd-Jones rather than Fränkel, Snell and Dodds. I have not hesitated to interpret the action of the *Iliad* in tragic terms and to use concepts that derive in one form or another from Aristotle's *Poetics*. There are clearly contexts in which it is essential to articulate sharply the differences that divide Homer and Greek tragedy. For my purposes it has been more important to emphasise a perspective that derives its authority from Plato, who called Homer the 'first teacher and master of tragedy' (*Republic*, 595c).

CHAPTER 2

The Plot of the *Iliad*

ACHILLES, HEKTOR AND THE FALL OF TROY

Homer's narrative is not particularly allusive or cryptic – it differs in this regard from an epic like *Beowulf* – but it assumes on the part of its readers a general knowledge of a set of stories no longer current in our culture. It is useful to begin with a summary of the 'Trojan Cycle', as one might call this set of stories, which intertwines two narrative strands, both of which lead back to a sexual adventure by Zeus. Some of these stories are explicitly referred to in the *Iliad*; others are known directly only from later sources. We cannot decide with certainty whether Homer did not know or did not choose to refer to elements of the narrative tradition known to us only from post-Homeric sources, and the situation is further complicated by the fact that virtually all stories include many and often significant variants. I shall assume here, without further argument, that Homer and his audience were familiar with substantially the same stories about Troy current in fifth-century Athens.

The first narrative strand leads back to Peleus and Thetis. Zeus took an interest in the latter but, learning of a prophecy that she would bear a son greater than his father, married her off to the mortal Peleus, to whom she bore Achilles. The wedding of Peleus and Thetis was celebrated with great pomp, and all the gods were invited, except for Eris (Quarrel). She took revenge by tossing into the company an apple with the inscription 'To the fairest'. Aphrodite, Athene and Hera each claimed possession of the apple, and it was decided to make Paris the arbiter of the dispute. The three goddesses presented themselves to Paris, then a shepherd on Mount Ida, and each sought to bribe him by a promise. Athene promised wisdom, Hera wealth and power, and Aphrodite the most beautiful woman. Paris chose Aphrodite.

At this point the story connects with the other strand, which leads back to Zeus' adventure with Leda, whom he visited in the shape of a swan. As a result of their union she laid an egg from which were hatched Helen and the twin brothers Kastor and Pollux. Because Helen grew up to be the most beautiful woman in the world, all Greek heroes became her suitors. Her human father Tyndareus extracted from them an oath that they would protect her marriage regardless of her choice. She married Menelaos, king of Sparta, but later Paris with the help of Aphrodite abducted Helen, while a guest at the court of Menelaos. Sworn to vengeance, the Greeks

assembled at Aulis for a retaliatory expedition against Troy under the leadership of Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae and brother of Menelaos. At Aulis the fleet was becalmed, because Artemis was angered at Agamemnon's shooting of a hind in her sanctuary, and the prophet Kal. has revealed that only the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia would appease the goddess. In some versions of the story Iphigenia is sacrificed, in others the sacrifice is averted at the last minute when Artemis spirits her away to Tauris and substitutes a hind on the altar. Homer's silence on this event, which provides the major motif for Klytaemnestra's murder of Agamemnon in the *Oresteia*, is very striking and is more likely the result of repression than of ignorance. Indeed, a veiled allusion to the events at Aulis may occur in the introduction of Kalchas (1.71), where he is described as having guided the ships of the Achaeans towards Troy through his prophetic powers. Agamemnon's hostility towards Kalchas may also be referred to that story.

The siege of Troy dragged on for ten years until, after the deaths of Hektor and Achilles, the city fell. But the Trojan Cycle does not come to an end with the conquest of Troy. On their return home, the victors suffered fates as lamentable as those of the defeated. Menelaos indeed returned home safely, and we meet him in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, leading an affluent life spiced by reminiscence. Odysseus also made it home, although only after much hardship. But Agamemnon returned to a humiliating death at the hands of his wife. Other warriors, like the lesser Aias, incurred the wrath of the gods and were shipwrecked. If we add to the sufferings of the victors the misfortunes of those who lost their lives before Troy was taken, the tradition presents us with a picture in which the concept of victory loses most of its meaning. The ambiguity of victory and defeat is echoed in the association of excellence and disaster that appears in the figures of Helen and Achilles, 'causes' of the beginning and end of the Trojan War. The wedding of Peleus and Thetis links them even prior to the birth of Achilles, and this narrative link is the source of the peculiar twilight in which these two semi-divine stars appear in the *Iliad*: *kakomēchanos eris* ('disaster-causing quarrel', 9.257), presides over both their fates.

The *Iliad* is in no sense a chronicle of the Trojan Cycle outlined above. Aristotle laid great stress on this point when he argued that Homer alone of the epic poets had a proper understanding of plot and concentrated on a single and unified action as opposed to a mere sequence of events (*Poetics*, 17.1455b16). Horace echoes the insight when he praises the author of the *Iliad* for 'plunging the reader in the midst of things' rather than beginning with the egg laid by Leda (*Ars Poetica*, 145–9). An innocent reader approaching the text without a knowledge of its title would not long remain in doubt about the limited scope of the narrative, since the first seven lines tell him to expect a poem about the cause and consequences of

Achilles' anger but say nothing about the beginning of the war, the progress of the ten-year-long siege, or the fall of Troy. Why did the Greeks call this poem about Achilles the *Iliad* even though Troy is not even mentioned in the poet's announcement of his theme? The traditional title points to the dual nature of the poem, which is indeed an account of the anger of Achilles, but moves beyond its own limits to include the larger event of which it is a part. The specific greatness of the *Iliad* resides in those principles of organisation that make the poem about Achilles a poem about Troy.

In composing an Achilleid that later ages would justly call the *Iliad* the poet's fundamental decision was to make the war hinge on the fate of Hektor, the 'holder' of Troy, as his name indicates. Troy stands or falls with Hektor, whose power the Trojans celebrated by calling his son Astyanax, 'city-guardian', for 'Hektor alone protected Ilion' (6.403). The association of Hektor's death with the fall of Troy is strongly marked in the *Iliad*. The famous prophecy about Troy's fall is put in Hektor's mouth when he meets Andromache on the battlements:

> For I know this thing well in my heart, and my mind knows it:
> there will come a day when sacred Ilion shall perish,
> and Priam, and the people of Priam of the strong ash spear. (6.447–9)

Siege imagery occurs repeatedly with Achilles' re-entry into battle, and when Hektor is killed the Trojans respond as if the city itself were burning and in ruins (below, p. 112).

This identification of the death of Hektor with the fall of Troy is the reason why the *Iliad* avoids any references to the particular circumstances of the city's end. Odysseus, still incognito among the Phaiakians, tests the extent of his reputation and establishes a setting for the revelation of his identity by asking Demodokos to sing about the fall of Troy. Demodokos sings how the Greeks pretended to abandon the siege, leaving behind a giant wooden horse as a gesture of propitiation, and how Odysseus, leading a contingent of warriors hidden in the horse, brought about the ruin of the city (*Odyssey*, 8.499). That is appropriate to a poem starring Odysseus but it destroys the premiss of the *Iliad*: if the Achaeans could not take Troy without the ruse of the Wooden Horse, Hektor was not after all the 'holder' of the city. Accordingly, the Wooden Horse is never mentioned in the *Iliad*, except for a veiled prophecy by Zeus that Troy will fall 'through the wiles of Athene' (15.71). Similarly, there is a tradition that Philoktetes is essential to the conquest of Troy: the archery of Paris must be balanced by archery on the Achaean side. That tradition is incompatible with both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and is consequently ignored, except for a brief reference in the Catalogue of Ships (2.724).

The death of Hektor not only seals the fall of Troy; it also completes the

destiny of Achilles, for according to his mother's prophecy 'it is decreed your death must come soon after Hektor's' (18.96). Achilles has a choice between a long and inglorious and a short and glorious life. The motif translates into the narrative of an individual life the condition of the warrior's existence: he cannot acquire glory without the risk of his life. The risk increases with the degree of excellence, and at the highest level the certainty of great fame is balanced by the certainty of early death.

A good story requires turning-points at which events could go in one direction or another. The *Iliad* is organised in such a way as to exclude turning-points beyond the death of Hektor. Achilles will die, and Troy will fall: there is no need for the poet to detail the circumstances by which events will take their course towards these inevitable outcomes. From the decision to hinge the outcome of the war on the death of Hektor arises the need to turn the duel of Hektor and Achilles into an encounter that both warriors must seek or cannot avoid. In the beginning Hektor and Achilles have individual reasons for avoiding one another. Hektor knows that he is the weaker fighter, and Achilles knows that he will not long survive an encounter with Hektor. The story therefore requires a motive that will urge Achilles towards Hektor even at the cost of his life and will make Hektor stand up to him even in the face of certain death.

ACHILLES IN BOOK 1

The initial position of Achilles is ambiguous and frustrating. He is 'a man of short life' (*minunthiados*, 1.352), as he says in his prayer to his mother. He is aware of his choice but sees the promise of glory eluding his grasp. In the *Odyssey* the shade of Achilles regrets the choice made in life:

> Better, I say, to break sod as a farmhand
> for some poor country man, on iron rations,
> than lord it over all the exhausted dead. (11.489–91)

That is a parody of the choice in the *Iliad*, where the alternative to heroism is hardly the life of a serf but the prosperous existence of a Thessalian landowner:

> There are many Achaian girls in the land of Hellas and Phthia,
> daughters of great men who hold strong places in guard. And of these
> any one that I please I might make my beloved lady.
> And the great desire in my heart drives me rather in that place
> to take a wedded wife in marriage, the bride of my fancy,
> to enjoy with her the possessions won by aged Peleus. (9.395–400)

The *Iliad* does not represent the enactment of Achilles' choice. He has already made it when the heroic world first beckons to him in the form of

Nestor and Odysseus on a recruiting mission and he literally jumps at the opportunity:

> we came
> and stood in the forecourt, and Achilleus sprang up wondering
> and took us by the hand and led us in, and told us to sit down,
> and set hospitality properly before us, as is the stranger's
> right. (11.775–9)

But Achilles flirts with unmaking his choice, and the intensity of that flirtation is a measure of his frustration. Ten years have gone by without the great event that would justify his choice. Then suddenly a plague strikes the Achaean camp and threatens to put an ignominious end both to the war and to his career. His first words give expression to his fear and implicitly tell us why the assembly was called by him rather than by an older warrior with more experience in council:

> Son of Atreus, I believe now that straggling backwards
> we must make our way home if we can even escape death,
> if fighting now must crush the Achaians and the plague likewise. (1.59–61)

The seer Kalchas reveals the cause of the plague. Agamemnon erred in not honouring the request by the priest Chryses to ransom his daughter. Apollo sent the plague in response to the prayers of the injured father and will not relent until Agamemnon returns Chryseis with damages. Agamemnon yields but demands that the army make up his losses. When Achilles suggests that this compensation be deferred until after the fall of Troy, Agamemnon refuses and goes on the offensive: unless he is reimbursed now he will take someone else's concubine, perhaps Achilles'. And he suggests that Achilles might be put in charge of returning the daughter of Chryses – leaving Agamemnon in a strong position to seize Briseis during his absence (1.146).

At this point Achilles explodes into the anger that will not cease until Hektor is ransomed. Like the motif of choice, the anger of Achilles is an idiosyncratic feature only to the degree that it reflects the warrior's condition with unmatched purity and intensity. The warrior's life is governed by two forms of competition. He competes with his enemy for victory and with his peers for honour. The paternal advice 'always excel' means 'always excel among your peers by defeating your enemies' (11.784). The warrior takes part in a dual distribution of rewards. In the competition with the enemy he seizes what he can take by force. His success supports his claim in a second distribution, where he receives what his peers are willing to allot him as his honour or *timē*: literally, an assessment of his worth expressed in material goods. This second distribution determines his standing among his peers, and it is essential

that this allotment be given to, rather than taken by, him. Thus the society of warriors is motivated by intense peer rivalry and faced with the task of distributive justice. This inherently unstable situation is the breeding-ground for *cholos* or *mēnis*, the uncontrollable anger of which Achilles gives the most spectacular example.

Anger is a necessary condition of the warrior's success in battle. The rhetoric of battle, with its speeches of reproach, encouragement and exultation, aims at unleashing it. More effective than such rhetoric is the death of the friend or kinsman, which impels the warrior to fierce revenge (below, p.100). These episodes of revenge in particular make clear how much the warrior's success depends on the speed with which he can be angered into violent action. To condition the warrior to an instant release of angry violence is one thing; to ensure that the target is chosen with discretion is another. Here the dual competition for honour reveals its paradoxical side. Peer rivalry creates frustrations that are as conducive to the release of anger as the encounter with the enemy, but in coping with these frustrations the warrior must be patient – a task to which he is the less fitted the more he excels in his *métier*. Anger is the dangerous passion that creates and destroys the warrior. Anger is to heroic what sex is to Victorian morality, and it is the favourite topic of parental advice, as in the words of Peleus that Odysseus recalls to Achilles:

> My child, for the matter of strength, Athene and Hera will give it
> if it be their will, but be it yours to hold fast in your bosom
> the anger of the proud heart, for consideration is better.
> Keep from the bad complication of quarrel, and all the more for this
> the Argives will honour you, both their younger men and their
> elders. (9.254–8)

Once Achilles explodes into anger, his quarrel with Agamemnon soon leaves behind its immediate cause. Achilles does not blame Agamemnon for his treatment of Chryses or for ignoring the advice of the army. The particular grievance triggers an outburst that shows him despairing of his promised hour of greatness. When he asks 'Why am I here?' or 'What have the Trojans done to me?' he speaks out of anxiety about the choice he made when he leapt up at the sight of Odysseus and Nestor. That is why at the end of the speech Achilles flirts with the possibility of revoking that choice:

> Now I am returning to Phthia, since it is much better
> to go home again with my curved ships, and I am minded no longer
> to stay here dishonoured and pile up your wealth and your
> luxury. (1.169–71)

Agamemnon responds to this flirtation by branding Achilles a traitor, and by announcing that he will personally seize Briseis. These two insults

put Achilles beside himself with rage, and he is on the verge of killing Agamemnon, thereby forfeiting glory for ever. In the space of less than a hundred lines the protagonist's quest for glory and the poet's quest for motivating his final event are threatened with a premature catastrophe of ignominious violence. This is the first instance in the *Iliad* of what Karl Reinhardt (1961, 48) has called the 'epic almost', the poet's penchant for momentarily twisting the action towards a resolution that would frustrate his own and his characters' ends. These moments of false resolution serve an important function since they articulate major changes of direction. The narrative that returns from its absurd escapade does so with a firmer sense of its true course. Thus, after the abortive duel of Paris and Menelaos, Zeus proposes to settle the war peacefully, but the indignant response of Hera results in Athene's mission to persuade Pandaros to break the truce. Similarly, Achilles almost suffers the unheroic fate of drowning (21.240), but his escape from the river is the last course correction in a narrative that rushes towards its climax with resistless force.

The change of direction usually involves the intervention of a god. In Book 1 it is Athene, appealing to Achilles' reason, while his sword is already drawn (1.194) – a vivid image of the extremity of the situation. Athene persuades him to refrain from violence and promises rich rewards in the future for putting up with Agamemnon's insults. Achilles substitutes invective for the sword and 'together with the son of Menoitios' (1.307) returns to his tent, where he will nurse his anger until the death of Patroklos will call him to battle again. The casual mention of Patroklos points forward to that moment and is a reminder of the poet's strategic use of detail.

Achilles' calling of the assembly, motivated by the desire to clear the path for decisive action, has the unintended consequence of putting up new and more impenetrable barriers. Whereas previously it was the external fact of the plague that stood in the way of triumph, now it is his own sense of injured honour. He summons his mother from the sea, rehearses the story of his outrage, asks her to intercede with Zeus on his behalf, and concludes with the extraordinary request:

> Sit beside him and take his knees and remind him of these things
> now, if perhaps he might be willing to help the Trojans,
> and pin the Achaians back against the ships and the water,
> dying, so that thus they may all have profit of their own king,
> that Atreus' son wide-ruling Agamemnon may recognize
> his madness, that he did no honour to the best of the
> Achaians. (1.407–12)

It is a commonplace that Homeric warriors have a weakly developed sense of group loyalty. Allegiance to a common cause runs a poor third to the

quest for individual honour and the commitment to an immediate kinsman or companion in arms. Even in this hierarchy of values Achilles' request amounts to treason, and, as events will show, it is a *hamartia* in Aristotle's sense, a disastrous error of judgement the mortal consequences of which will rebound upon Achilles himself.

The request originates with Achilles. Nothing that Athene had told him would prompt or justify so desperate a step. 'Wait and you will be recompensed,' Athene had said – not unlike the witches' words: 'All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter.' Both times the human recipient of the prophecy goes beyond its terms, and in acting to ensure its success fatally taints the manner of its fulfilment. In strict narrative terms the request is redundant. What Achilles asks for is no more than what will happen as the consequence of his withdrawal: without his presence Hektor will take the offensive and wreak havoc among the Achaeans. But, while the request does not affect the sequence of events, it radically changes their significance. Without the request, Agamemnon bears the blame for the consequences of their quarrel. That is the view held by the characters in the poem, all of whom are ignorant of Achilles' dealings with Zeus and Thetis. Agamemnon himself admits that he is at fault well before the consequences of his mistake are apparent (2.378). But for the reader the request changes the allocation of responsibility. The suffering of the Achaeans no longer appears as the regrettable consequence of a position into which Achilles was forced. Not a quarrel started by Agamemnon, but the vindictive despair of Achilles becomes the *archē* of the tragedy; the causal chain leads back to an action by Achilles rather than, as Redfield (pp. 107, 122) has argued, to his reaction to the arrogance of Agamemnon.

Achilles' request for the destruction of the Achaeans, so redundant on the narrative level, is the poet's chief device for establishing a problematic relationship between self and action and for concatenating his plot in a tragic manner. Fragment 231 from Aeschylus' lost Achilles trilogy cites the fable of the eagle who recognises as his own the feathers guiding the arrow that mortally wounded him. The passage is perhaps the most striking expression of the paradox of that relationship in Attic tragedy (Schadewaldt, 1970). The plot turns on a disaster that overwhelms the protagonist from without and yet is intimately tied to his own being. The fable of the eagle focuses on the moment of recognition. The correlative of such recognition is ignorance. In Attic tragedy the beginning of ignorance usually lies outside the action itself, since it prefers the crisis of disillusionment to the progressive entanglement in delusion. Because the epic narrative has time for both, the exposition of the *Iliad* gives emphatic attention to the initial moment of blindness. Patroklos will be the most prominent of the Achaeans whose death Achilles so ardently desires at this point. If Achilles knew this, he would never utter his wish; that he can do so is a measure of his blindness.

HEKTOR DURING THE ABSENCE OF ACHILLES

The opening book of the *Iliad* creates the conditions for the fulfilment of Achilles' destiny, but from Achilles' perspective the possibility of heroic achievement has receded. The restless activity that brought disaster to so many cities around Troy, if not to Troy itself, has come to an indefinite halt. The change in the situation of Achilles produces a similarly ironic change in his antagonist. Hektor is at heart a defensive warrior, but the absence of Achilles tempts him beyond the walls into a new and more aggressive role. When he is about to set fire to the ship and victory seems in his grasp he imagines that the world outside the walls is his true home:

> Bring fire, and give single voice to the clamour of battle.
> Now Zeus has given us a day worth all the rest of them:
> the ships' capture, the ships that came here in spite of the gods' will
> and have visited much pain on us, by our counsellors' cowardice
> who would not let me fight by the grounded ships, though I wanted to,
> but held me back in restraint, and curbed in our fighters. (15.718–23)

Hektor's confidence rests on a misunderstanding but, as with Achilles, the misunderstanding is essential to his achievement of heroic fame.

Homer takes great pains to establish that Hektor's natural place is inside the city. While Hektor appears sporadically in the first few books, his full introduction is delayed until Book 6, where he appears in a setting that emphasises social integration. The poet even takes some narrative risks to achieve the setting. At a moment of danger Hektor returns to Troy and tells his mother to offer a sacrifice to Athene. It would make more strategic sense to entrust such an errand to a herald, but Homer wants Hektor inside Troy for reasons that become apparent with the description of his arrival:

> Now as Hektor had come to the Skaian gates and the oak tree,
> all the wives of the Trojans and their daughters came running about him
> to ask after their sons, after their brothers and neighbours,
> their husbands; and he told them to pray to the immortals,
> all, in turn; but there were sorrows in store for many. (6.237–41)

The brilliant vignette establishes sympathetic identification as the basis of our response to Hektor, as Milton saw well when he used the scene to shape his account of the angels' reaction to the news of the fall of man (*Paradise Lost*, 10.21). Hektor is 'like us' in the Aristotelian sense (*Poetics*, 13.1453a5) that transcends the difference between the eighth-century listener and the late-twentieth-century reader. Like us, and unlike Achilles, he is defined by a web of communal relations rather than by an identity that realises itself in solitude and defiance of all social norms.

Hektor's visit to Troy unfolds as a sequence of three encounters with his mother, his brother and sister-in-law, and finally his wife and son. Three

times Hektor refuses an invitation to stay. Although the visit is a reprieve from the furious pace of fighting, the narrative does not come to a rest. Hektor's sense of being in a hurry moves it along and introduces the disturbance of war into a world still untouched by it.

After giving instructions to his mother Hektor proceeds to the house of Paris, whom the reader had last encountered in his bedroom, where Aphrodite had taken him after his near-defeat at the hands of Menelaos. There, far from any sense of guilt or shame, he had made love to Helen, declaring that never before had he felt a similar passion for her (3.442). The narrative of Hektor in Troy does not allude to Paris' defeat in Book 3, but it endows Paris with the same languor to serve as a foil for Hektor's restless obsession with duty. As Hektor enters the house of Paris, the poet develops the contrast through the setting:

> There entered Hektor beloved of Zeus, in his hand holding
> the eleven-cubit-long spear, whose shaft was tipped with a shining
> bronze spearhead, and a ring of gold was hooped to hold it.
> He found the man in his chamber busy with his splendid armour,
> the corselet and the shield, and turning in his hands the curved bow,
> while Helen of Argos was sitting among her attendant women
> directing the magnificent work done by her handmaidens. (6.318–24)

The spear in the hand is the sign of battle-readiness; it is the last piece of equipment taken by the warrior in the conventional arming scene. When Achilles seizes his spear, he is ready for battle (19.387); similarly, the failure of Patroklos to pick up the spear of Achilles points to his ruin (16.140). The spear is the first weapon of which the warrior disburdens himself. Thus Telemachos takes the spear of the disguised Athene and puts it in a rack with the spears of Odysseus, a sign of his competence as host and a reminder of the revenge that takes its beginning with this divine visit (*Odyssey*, 1.127). Hektor holds on to his spear even inside the house of Paris, a visible reproof to his laggard brother who is busying himself about his 'splendid armour', but shows no particular signs of putting it on.

The scene moves quickly from Paris to Helen, who is no more successful than Hekabe in detaining Hektor: he has no time and must return to the Trojans in the field who miss him. But perhaps she could hurry up her husband, who might even catch up with him:

> For I am going first to my own house, so I can visit my own
> people, my beloved wife and my son, who is little,
> since I do not know if ever again I shall come back this way,
> or whether the gods will strike me down at the hands of the
> Achaians. (6.365–8)

In this manner Homer introduces one of the most celebrated scenes in Western literature. The *mise-en-scène* is profoundly ironic, since the

irresponsible brother's tardiness clears the time for the encounter of the dutiful husband with his faithful wife. Having twice refused the luxury of sitting down, Hektor finds time to visit his wife while Paris puts on his armour. Indeed, the arming of Paris frames the scene: Hektor on his way from Andromache meets with Paris prancing towards battle, and Paris in a bantering and apologetic mood asks whether he did hold up Hektor after all (6.518).

Similar ironies surround the place of the meeting. Unlike Hekabe and Paris, Andromache is not at home; husband and wife miss one another out of an identity of motives. He goes home because it might be the last time; she has madly rushed to the battlements because she fears for his life in the Achaean onslaught. And Hektor, deprived of the chance of sitting down at home, must rush off again (*ho d' apessuto dòmatos Hektòr*, 6.390) to meet her as she comes 'running' back from the battlements (*ēlthe theousa*, 6.394). And so they meet, not at the appointed place and time, as one might expect from the orderly narrative of the grand epic when it brings together the prince and his consort, but somehow somewhere sometime as their paths cross and for a brief space their breathless confusion comes to a halt. If this sounds fanciful, compare the absence of ceremony with the formality of the encounters with Hekabe (242) and Paris (313). One might even think of the elaborately described bed of Odysseus and Penelope as a narrative possibility that the poet forgoes at this point (*Odyssey*, 23.184).

The setting anticipates their conversation, which turns on the paradox that Hektor cannot stay at home precisely because he treasures its values so highly. Like Hekabe and Helen, Andromache seeks to detain Hektor, but her temptation is more radical, for she wants to keep Hektor in Troy altogether, fighting the enemy from the security of the towers (6.431). Andromache's temptation gains poignancy from her special circumstances. Hektor is all she has: her father and her brothers are dead, killed by Achilles when he sacked the city of Thebe; her mother, captive but ransomed, died shortly afterwards:

> Hektor, thus you are father to me, and my honoured mother,
> you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband. (6.429–30)

The history of Andromache sets up the expectation that Achilles, who deprived her of everything else, will also deprive her of Hektor. This expectation is both weakened and strengthened by the link of Andromache's history with the main plot. Through a stroke of economy pregnant with narrative implications Homer has identified the expedition against Thebe with the expedition during which Chryseis was captured. The link is stressed in the opening of Achilles' narrative to his mother: 'We went against Thebe, the sacred city of Eëtion' (1.366). Inasmuch as the withdrawal of Achilles results from this expedition, the fears of Andromache

are, for the moment, groundless. But inasmuch as this withdrawal leads to the death of Patroklos and to a re-entry into battle directed exclusively against Hektor her anxiety is only too well founded. And the poet looks forward not only to the time of Hektor's death but also to the savagery of its circumstances. What else could be the point of portraying an Achilles who in the Theban expedition scrupulously respected the rights of the dead, except to measure his transformation after the death of Patroklos:

> He killed Eëtion
> but did not strip his armour, for his heart respected the dead man,
> but burned the body in all its elaborate war-gear
> and piled a grave mound over it, and the nymphs of the mountains,
> daughters of Zeus of the aegis, planted elm trees about it. (6.416–20)

Hektor's response, far from allaying her fears, confirms them. She had not dared to look beyond the possibility of Hektor's death, but his reply is grounded in the certainty of Troy's fall (6.447–9). But even so he must fight, not only to avoid the reproaches of the Trojans but also in order to live up to the commands of his self:

> since I have learned to be valiant
> and to fight always among the foremost ranks of the Trojans,
> winning for my own self great glory, and for my father. (6.444–6)

Heroic clairvoyance may destroy human feeling. It threatens to do so in the case of Achilles, separated from his friend by death, from his father by distance, and from his mother by her divinity. The clairvoyance of Hektor, on the other hand, co-exists with intense feeling and regret, which manifests itself in the vision of the enslaved Andromache that closes his speech. From the horror of this vision Hektor turns to the present and indulges in the wish-fulfilment of an imagined future for his son. The relationship of father and son is central to the warrior code, and nothing expresses more fully the poet's sympathy with and ironic distance from that code than his subtlety in the treatment of that relationship. All Iliadic instances are in one form or another fractured. Nestor relates at length how he showed himself worthy of his father Neleus (11.683), but it is hard to imagine Nestor young, and when he appears in the *Iliad* with his son Antilochos there is more than a touch of Polonius in him (23.301). Tydeus is twice held up as a heroic example to Diomedes, but he is long since dead (4.372, 5.800). Peleus must endure the afflictions of age while his son has gone never to return. With Priam and Hektor the poet had the opportunity to show the relationship with both father and son in their prime, embodying between them the continuity of succession and the fullness of the heroic ideal of courage and wisdom. But Hektor and Priam never appear together in the *Iliad*. When the *Iliad* brings together a father and a son both in their prime, it will be in the meeting of Achilles and Priam, the most violently broken and the most profound version of the relationship.

In Book 6 the father–son relationship appears in the form of the domestic idyll and becomes the crowning instance of the clash between the heroic and the domestic that pervades the entire book. As in the earlier Paris scene, a piece of armour provides the prop on which the scene turns. Hektor's most distinctive epithet is *koruthaiolos* ('helm-shimmering'). Others may recognise Hektor by the splendour of his helmet, but for Astyanax it blocks recognition, and in the typical gesture of a baby 'making strange' he seeks refuge in the familiar bosom of his nurse (6.466). The incident joins husband and wife in laughter and dispels for a moment the grim vision of a future in which Hektor is dead and Andromache captive. But the scene is no less prophetic than those visions: Astyanax turning away from his father's helmet anticipates in that gesture the denial of the heroic role his father wishes for him. No less meaningful is the gesture with which Hektor takes off his helmet – a disarming and abandonment of heroic identity that looks forward to Patroklos' loss of his helmet (16.793) or the analogous loss by Andromache of her headgear when she faints on seeing the body of her husband dragged around the city (22.466). The no-longer-heroic father speaks to his never-to-be-heroic son, but out of this situation comes the most conventional prayer for heroic succession:

> Zeus, and you other immortals, grant that this boy, who is my son,
> may be as I am, pre-eminent among the Trojans,
> great in strength, as am I, and rule strongly over Ilion;
> and some day let them say of him: 'He is better by far than his father,'
> as he comes in from the fighting; and let him kill his enemy
> and bring home the blooded spoils, and delight the heart of his mother. (6.476–81)

The poet does not bother to register the response of Zeus to this so obviously deluded prayer. Instead he focuses on Andromache's response as she receives the child back in her arms, *dakruoen gelasasa* ('laughing amidst tears', 6.484). Is it permissible to think of Chekhov, where we find the same genius for establishing a coherent effect from a mosaic of contradictory emotions and utterances?

As he turns to his wife, Hektor changes moods again. In words designed to comfort Andromache he neither predicts doom nor indulges in dreams but retreats to a pragmatic fatalism: Who knows what is to come? In the meantime you do your work, and I will do mine (6.486). The end of the scene returns to its beginning. Andromache goes home, not to her weaving, as Hektor had told her, but to mourn him with her maids while he is still alive (6.500). The lines echo Hektor's earlier statement that he will visit Andromache because he might not return from battle (6.367).

The Hektor who leaves Andromache enters into a new role created by the

absence of Achilles. It is a false role for him, and he does not become himself again until his death is imminent. Throughout the course of his seeming triumph, which takes him across the Achaean wall to the ship of Protesilaos, the poet consistently shows him as a man not fully in control of himself. The new Hektor is given to 'hectoring', as in the following speech early on the second day of fighting:

> Trojans, Lykians and Dardanians who fight at close quarters,
> be men now, dear friends, remember your furious valour.
> I see that the son of Kronos has bowed his head and assented
> to my high glory and success, but granted the Danaans
> disaster: fools, who designed with care these fortifications,
> flimsy things, not worth a thought, which will not beat my strength
> back, but lightly my horses will leap the ditch they have dug them.
> But after I have come beside their hollow ships, let there
> be some who will remember to bring me ravening fire,
> so that I can set their ships on fire, and cut down
> the very Argives mazed in the smoke at the side of their
> vessels. (8.173–83)

The new Hektor shows a misplaced confidence in divine support and holds out the prospect of victories that never quite materialise. But he comes very close to his goals. Twice he pins the Achaeans back on the ships. The first time Hera inspires a counter-rally (8.217); the second time only nightfall saves the Achaeans from total disaster (8.348, 485).

Encouraged by the events of the day, the Trojans camp outside the city for the first time. Flaring fires express their new confidence, and in an exuberant speech Hektor promises to defeat Diomedes (8.532). Reality gives the lie to his hyperbolic boast: on the following day Diomedes easily has the upper hand; his spear, while failing to pierce Hektor's helmet, stuns him:

> But Hektor sprang far away back and merged among his own people,
> and dropping to one knee stayed leaning on the ground with his heavy
> hand, and a covering of black night came over both eyes. (11.354–6)

This discrepancy between promise and performance is repeated in the long-delayed encounter of Hektor and Aias on the third day of fighting. At the end of Book 13 the warriors meet, and Hektor replies to a taunting speech by Aias with words that echo his presumption of divine support on the previous night:

> Aias, you inarticulate ox, what is this you have spoken?
> If I could only be called son to Zeus of the aegis
> all the days of my life, and the lady Hera my mother,

> and I be honoured, as Apollo and Athene are honoured,
> so surely as this is a day that brings evil to the
> Argives. (13.824–8; cf. 8.539–41)

The expected clash of the warriors does not happen immediately, but when it takes place Aias is clearly victorious: only the assistance of his companions saves Hektor from certain death on this occasion, and it takes the healing skills of Apollo to restore him to battle (14.402, 15.239).

The two incidents in part derive from the Achaean bias of the narrative. The plot requires that Hektor be second only to Achilles, but the poet is also subject to constraints that prevent him from crediting Hektor with a clear-cut victory over an Achaean of the first rank. The constraint in Homer's hands becomes a potent tool of characterisation and serves to underscore the imbalance of word and action that defines the changed Hektor. There are other expressions of this lack of balance. A fairly common convention associates the warrior at the height of battle with personifications of terror. The persistent use of this motif with Hektor suggests that the withdrawal of Achilles has put him in some sense beside himself. In his pursuit of the Achaeans he appears 'wearing the stark eyes of a Gorgon, or murderous Ares' (8.349). Odysseus portrays him to Achilles as seized by *lussa*, a word for madness also used of rabid dogs (9.239, 305). In his attack on the gates Hektor is dark as night with fiery eyes (12.462). There may be a kind of sublimity in that image, but the degraded violence of a rabid animal comes more readily to mind in the description of Hektor's final assault on the ships:

> A slaver came out around his mouth, and under the lowering
> brows his eyes were glittering, the helm on his temples
> was shaken and thundered horribly to the fighting of Hektor. (15.607–9)

Hektor's instability is further underscored through a change in flanking characters. The sense of social obligation that is so much part of his nature had been conveyed through the contrast of Hektor and Paris. But the poet drops the contrast of the unequal brothers after Book 6 and shows Hektor in the company of his cousin Poulydamas, a sober counsellor whose advice he rejects at critical moments. Completely untouched by the *lussa* that has taken hold of his greater cousin, Poulydamas points to delusion as the central theme in the career of Hektor. It is a telling detail that on the one occasion on which Hektor upbraids Paris during the third day of fighting he is wrong and Paris tells him so in words that clearly contrast with the meek and apologetic spirit in which he previously accepted his brother's remonstrations (13.775; cf. 3.59, 6.333).

Poulydamas and Hektor first clash when the Trojan attack on the wall stalls, partly because of Achaean resistance and partly because of a bird

omen that terrifies the Trojans. Poulydamas offers what turns out to be the correct interpretation of the omen: the Trojans will not sustain their attack but will suffer losses and eventual defeat just as the eagle in the omen was unable to hold on to the snake it had caught. On the basis of this interpretation Poulydamas counsels retreat (12.216), but Hektor indignantly rejects this advice and pits his earlier assurances from Zeus (11.192) against the augur's professional competence. This is the speech that contains the famous line 'one bird sign is best: to fight in defence of our country' (12.243). The line is often quoted out of context to demonstrate the noble patriotism of Hektor. So it does, but it also marks a state of delusion that invests his sentiments with a peculiar pathos. This is the one opportunity for Hektor to retreat without loss of face from his exposed situation. He misses it because he does not know the ambiguity of Zeus' promise. The perspective from which the contradiction of divine utterance is resolved, and which is always available to the reader, becomes apparent to the character only through a catastrophic denouement. There is a strong parallelism between Hektor and Achilles in this regard: just as Hektor rejects sensible advice out of a misplaced confidence in Zeus, so Achilles rejects the offer of Agamemnon out of the conviction that he enjoys the special protection of Zeus (see below, p. 48).

The rejection of Poulydamas' advice marks the midpoint in Hektor's career and is followed shortly by his first great achievement, the storming of the gates. In the counter-offensive brought about by the intervention of Poseidon, Hektor plays a marginal role as the poet keeps him in reserve for his triumphant appearance in the battle of the ships. Where the poet focuses on Hektor in this part of the work he dwells on the vulnerability of his strength and judgement: here we find his unjustified attack on Paris and his ignominious defeat at the hands of Aias.

The triumph of Hektor begins with his restoration by Apollo. Once more he rushes into battle, and with the god's support his progress is irresistible. Apollo levels ditch and wall with the ease of a child trampling a sandcastle (15.360), and the Trojans flood across the opening and towards the ships. Hektor's offensive threatens to undo nine years of war as the narrative returns to its point of departure. In the second book the first marshalling of the Achaeans on the plain, probably an echo of their first arrival, had been compared to a gathering of migrating birds in the Caÿstrian plain. The same birds recur here, 'feeding alongside a river', but now they are attacked by the eagle Hektor (2.460 = 15.692). The same return to the beginning underlies the poet's choice of the ship to which Hektor sets fire. It is the ship of Protesilaos, of whom the catalogue tells us that he was the first warrior to land and to be killed on Trojan soil (2.698). For Hektor, of course, this return to the beginning is the desired end; little does he know that the narrative will recoil from this 'almost' only to move more fiercely towards its eventual goal.

THE EMBASSY

The encounter of Achilles and Hektor depends upon the withdrawal of the former, which tempts Hektor beyond the safety of the walls. The withdrawal is the beginning of the plot, the duel its end. The protagonist is absent in the middle. That absence is a narrative fact of great and continuing significance. But its representation is a narrative problem. So is the difficulty of developing in adequate detail the character of the protagonist if the design of the plot severely limits the places of his appearance.

The Embassy is Homer's answer to both problems. A delegation of Achaeans implores Achilles to give up his anger, accept enormous damages from Agamemnon and rejoin the fighting. The attempt must fail since the absence of Achilles must continue, but the failure turns into a magnificent occasion for impressing his absent presence on the reader's mind. Moreover, the Embassy does for Achilles what the encounter with Andromache did for Hektor: it provides a setting in which he can speak freely and passionately about the conditions of his existence.

The decision to approach Achilles is made in a council of Achaean leaders. Nestor diplomatically but firmly points to the link between the desperate situation of the army and Agamemnon's treatment of Achilles. He urges Agamemnon to reconcile Achilles 'with splendid gifts and gentle words' (9.113). Agamemnon readily concedes his mistake (114), states his willingness to make amends and lists a long catalogue of gifts that are indeed splendid. He concludes with words that are deficient in gentleness but may be no more than an attempt to save a little face in a humiliating situation:

> And let him yield place to me, inasmuch as I am the kinglier
> and inasmuch as I can call myself born the elder. (9.160–1)

Nestor is full of praise: 'nobody could blame your *gifts*,' he says, but then takes care to ensure that the proper words will be spoken as well. He picks the delegation to offer the settlement to Achilles, consisting of Phoinix, the former tutor of Achilles, Aias, the leading soldier after Achilles, and Odysseus, the shrewdest counsellor. Although Agamemnon's offer as he stated it was incomplete, what Achilles receives is a proper offer of 'splendid gifts and gentle words'. The delegation is as high-ranking as Homeric protocol can imagine. It is out of the question that Agamemnon should go himself. The bitterness of their quarrel makes mediation imperative and socially acceptable. When Achilles later says 'He wouldn't dare come here himself' (9.373), the words cannot be taken as the poet's criticism of Agamemnon but reflect Achilles' disastrous refusal to acknowledge the change in circumstances. That Priam will in person reconcile an

even more implacable Achilles serves not to call into question the propriety of the earlier occasion but to emphasise the unheard-of nature of Priam's visit. The propriety of the offer is also a major argument in Phoinix' speech (9.518).

The arrival of the ambassadors marks one of those Homeric epiphanies in which the poet looks back and forth to comprehend the entire action in one setting:

> Now they came beside the shelters and ships of the Myrmidons
> and they found Achilles delighting his heart in a lyre, clear-sounding,
> splendid and carefully wrought, with a bridge of silver upon it,
> which he won out of the spoils when he ruined Eëtion's city.
> With this he was pleasuring his heart, and singing of men's fame,
> as Patroklos was sitting over against him, alone, in silence,
> watching Aiakides and the time he would leave off singing. (9.185–91)

The lyre points back to the quarrel and forward to the fate of Andromache, Eëtion's daughter. Achilles is inactive, but his unquenchable thirst for glory finds temporary satisfaction in heroic poetry; his listener is Patroklos, the instrument and victim of his ultimate triumph.

As the delegates approach, Achilles leaps up with the same impulsiveness that will govern his response to Odysseus' speech; he does not even take the time to put aside his lyre (9.194). His strong and cordial welcome is in character: the first book had made a point of his courtesy in his treatment of the heralds who had come on the unpleasant task of claiming Briseis (1.334). But the emphasis on courtesy also establishes a background for the violence of the subsequent eruption. After the customary meal Odysseus turns to business. At the centre of his speech stands the verbatim repetition of Agamemnon's offer, minus the concluding insistence on his superiority. The arguments that frame it are from the speaker's perspective the most persuasive he can think of, but as the poet's words they are composed with a knowledge of the future and look forward to the consequences of Achilles' refusal. Odysseus describes in lurid detail how Hektor has become a threat to the Achaeans and how Achilles' prophecy in the first assembly has come true. The words are meant to gratify Achilles, but Odysseus attaches a warning, and the poet looks forward to the Patrokleia:

> Up, then! if you are minded, late though it be, to rescue
> the afflicted sons of the Achaians from the Trojan onslaught.
> It will be an affliction to you hereafter, there will be no remedy
> found to heal the evil thing when it has been done. No, beforehand
> take thought to beat the evil day aside from the Danaans. (9.247–51)

Encouraged by the courteous reception, Odysseus then strikes a tone of

camaraderie (*ō pepon*, 9.252) and puts himself in the position of an older mentor, reminding him of his father's advice to control his temper in order to gain glory among the Achaians. This memory provides the link to the repetition of Agamemnon's lavish offer. At the end of his speech he returns to the theme of the raging Hektor. If Agamemnon is hateful to you, he says, think of the other Achaeans and the glory they will bestow on you:

> For now you might kill Hektor, since he would come very close to you
> with the wicked fury upon him, since he thinks there is not his equal
> among the rest of the Danaans the ships carried hither. (9.304–6)

The words project a non-tragic resolution and set the stage for Achilles' violent refusal through which such a resolution is ruled out for ever. Achilles' refusal is not, as Eichholz argued in an influential essay, a just response to an inadequate offer but an intensified repetition of his behaviour in Book 1. The Embassy continues the theme of vindictive intransigence that began with his prayer to Zeus and represents the repeated 'no' of Achilles as a decision for whose consequences he bears the responsibility.

Whereas Odysseus had dwelt emphatically on the change in the circumstances of the Achaeans, Achilles pretends that nothing has changed. His speech is a passionate repetition and extravagant elaboration of his earlier grievances about Agamemnon's rapacity. The six lines of the original complaint (1.163) are magnified as Achilles sees himself as a mother bird ceaselessly working on behalf of her young while Agamemnon sits back, dividing the spoils and keeping the lion's share. The iterative verb forms, lost in the translation, add colour to his language. His whole life is based on the premiss of distinction, but the war has proved a great leveller: 'we are all held in a single honour, the brave with the weaklings' (9.319). He has gained nothing from always risking his life (9.322). Why should he fight for other men's wives (9.339)? The rehearsal of grievances leads, as in the assembly, to a flirtation with the alternative of an unheroic life, also greatly intensified:

> But, now I am unwilling to fight against brilliant Hektor,
> tomorrow, when I have sacrificed to Zeus and to all gods,
> and loaded well my ships, and rowed out on to the salt water,
> you will see, if you have a mind to it and if it concerns you,
> my ships in the dawn at sea on the Hellespont where the fish swarm
> and my men manning them with good will to row. If the glorious
> shaker of the earth should grant us a favouring passage
> on the third day thereafter we might raise generous Phthia. (9.356–63)

There is in the *Iliad* a rhetoric of the unreal, that is to say, a tendency to elaborate through special flights of language departures from reality as the

poet and his reader know it. The suspicion aroused by such rhetoric is usually confirmed if we compare what the character says with what actually happens. Diomedes and Aias give the lie to Hektor's boasts (above, p. 41). The gifts of Agamemnon are described in such lavish detail because they will be rejected. Achilles' elaboration of his plan to go home is similarly deflated by reality. When Achilles speaks of arriving in Phthia on the third day (or the day after tomorrow, as we would say) that prediction contrasts with the reality of the duel of Hektor and Achilles, which will take place on that day. It is a further ironic effect that Achilles' outburst occurs in the same night in which Hektor makes his decision to stay outside the walls (8.497).

Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's gifts exceeds their description in its extravagance. He will have nothing to do with them even if they outnumber the sand on the beach, nor will he marry the daughters of Agamemnon even if they combine the beauty of Aphrodite with the skills of Athene. When in this context Achilles claims that Agamemnon will not persuade him 'until he had made good to me all this heart-rending insolence' (9.387) the words cannot be taken as referring to some inadequacy in Agamemnon's offer. Rather, they show that there is no conceivable settlement that Achilles would accept. Unreality also pervades Achilles' portrayal of the quiet life that awaits him on his return to Phthia, but the height of absurdity is reached when Achilles, the paragon of the risk-taking man, exalts survival as the highest value and argues that not even the treasures of Troy should lead a man to risk his life (9.400). At this point the motif of the choice appears in its explicit form:

> For my mother Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me
> I carry two sorts of destiny toward the day of my death. Either,
> if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,
> my return home is gone, but my glory shall be everlasting;
> but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,
> the excellence of my glory is gone, but there will be a long life
> left for me, and my end in death will not come to me quickly. (9.410–16)

Here is another Homeric 'almost'; what will bring about the fulfilment of the original choice is precisely the mode in which Achilles seeks to cancel it.

Whereas Odysseus had dwelt on the opportunities for glory, Phoinix in the second plea turns to the consequences of intransigence. He ends with a warning: if you do not give up your anger now when you can cash it in for the reward of glory, you may have to give it up when you will get nothing for it. Achilles in his response dwells on the sufficient honour he is receiving from Zeus (9.608), without recognising that this honour will be purchased at the price of Patroklos' life. His misplaced confidence is the

structural equivalent of Hektor's when he rejects the advice of Poulydamas (above, p. 43). Yet there is an important tension between the beginning and the end of Achilles' response to Phoinix. While his confidence in Zeus is a sign of his continuing intransigence, the conclusion of his speech yields a little. To Odysseus he had said: Tomorrow I will sail. To Phoinix he says: Tomorrow we will deliberate whether to go home or stay. This partial yielding will happen again in the response to Aias (9.650) and at the opening of the Patrokleia (16.60), with results far worse than either a complete turn or continued intransigence.

Aias does not initially address Achilles at all but comments to Odysseus on the failure of the mission (9.624). The words of the plain soldier are particularly valuable because they show how much Achilles' behaviour breaks established norms. Men have been known to settle disputes over the death of a kinsman, he says, but you – and here he suddenly turns to Achilles – persist in a quarrel over nothing more than a girl (the emphatic enjambment *heineka kourēs/oiēs* makes his point very well, 9.637–8). Gradually the speech of Aias turns into a final appeal that recalls Achilles' welcoming words in which he had greeted the delegates as the dearest of the Achaeans:

> Yet now we offer you seven, surpassingly lovely,
> and much beside these. Now make gracious the spirit within you.
> Respect your own house; see, we are under the same roof with you,
> from the multitude of the Danaans, we who desire beyond all
> others to have your honour and love, out of all the Achaians. (9.638–42)

If the words of Aias show his incomprehension of Achilles' behaviour, it seems that Achilles himself is puzzled by the resistance of his passion to conventional forms of treatment, for his response to the blunt Aias is unexpectedly conciliatory (9.644). He yields a little more. Gone is the flirtation with going home and, while he still refuses to fight, the future he now envisages is dominated by Hektor:

> I shall not think again of the bloody fighting
> until such time as the son of wise Priam, Hektor the brilliant,
> comes all the way to the ships of the Myrmidons, and their shelters,
> slaughtering the Argives, and shall darken with fire our vessels.
> But around my own shelter, I think, and beside my black ship
> Hektor will be held, though he be very hungry for battle. (9.650–5)

The progress of the Embassy repeats that of the first assembly. An original decision to go home is replaced by a decision to wait while Hektor inflicts damage. The moment of crisis, however, is more sharply defined: whereas in the assembly Achilles foresaw in general terms the savage work of Hektor, now he envisages more clearly the battle near the ships, and he

states the point beyond which he will not allow Hektor to go. What changes the situation from the first book is the fact that the attitude of Achilles persists in the light of a serious attempt, fully adequate to the norms of the warrior code, to offer a just settlement. Achilles' refusal to accept the offer changes the mode of conflict resolution from negotiation to violence and greatly increases the cost to himself. Thus the Embassy does to the story of Achilles what the abortive duel of Menelaos and Paris and the broken truce do to the story of the war.

THE PATROKLEIA

The plot of the *Iliad* is made possible by the blindness of the protagonists. Hektor and Achilles become mortal enemies through a sequence of errors. The first and most pregnant of these errors is Achilles' prayer to Zeus after his withdrawal from battle. It leads to Hektor's false security, and it sets Achilles on the path of blind intransigence. In the Embassy, Achilles compounds the initial error by rejecting an opportunity that would more than redress his grievance. But the Embassy also puts an end to the flirtation with the pleasures of the quiet life. When we next see Achilles he has become an active observer. As the battle rages and even Aias is forced to retreat, he stands in the bow of his ship 'looking out over the sheer war work and the sorrowful onrush' (11.600) and, we may confidently add, waiting for Hektor. Nestor drives by, carrying on his chariot the wounded Machaon, whom Achilles does not quite recognise. He summons Patroklos to find out:

> At once he spoke to his own companion in arms, Patroklos,
> calling from the ships, and he heard it from inside the shelter,
> and came out
> like the war god, and this was the beginning of his evil. (11.602–4)

Here is another instance of the poet's tracing of a causal chain to an act of Achilles. Whereas in the previous scenes Patroklos was present, now he is summoned to his fate. The poet honours him with the epithet *isos Arēï*, 'like the war god', but he dwells on his passive role as respondent. The beginning of his tragedy points forward to the circumstances of his death in which his status as victim finds its most pitiful expression.

Patroklos dutifully goes to Nestor's tent, where he sees Machaon. His task is done; it only remains for him to return to Achilles and tell him. Anxious to leave, he does not enter the tent nor does he accept an invitation to sit down, but Nestor detains him anyhow with a litany of Achaean woes that soon turns into an account of his first triumph as a young warrior. The rambling narrative implicitly contrasts the eagerness of the young Nestor with the reluctance of Achilles. In the final part of his speech

Nestor's reminiscences turn to Achilles directly. We learn about the recruiting mission of Odysseus and Nestor, about Peleus' warnings about the consequences of yielding to anger, and about the counselling role Patroklos as the older friend is supposed to play. Returning to the present, Nestor suggests a compromise: if you cannot persuade him to fight, perhaps he will let you fight in his armour. Stirred by Nestor's words Patroklos hurries to Achilles' tent, no longer to confirm the identity of Machaon, but to try his skill at persuasion. This new intention is both blocked and advanced by yet another obstacle that prevents the speedy execution of his mission. On his way back he encounters Eurypylos

> limping
> away from the battle, and the watery sweat was running
> down his shoulders and face, and from the sore wound dark blood
> continued to drip, and yet the will stayed steady within
> him (11.811–13)

Like Machaon, Eurypylos is the victim of Paris' archery. The characters are doublets: the former motivates Patroklos' visit to Nestor, the latter delays his return until the fighting has taken an even more desperate turn. The narrative motivation has a thematic colouring. Despite his loyalty to Achilles, Patroklos does not hate the Achaeans. Nestor's words had moved him; in the figure of Eurypylos the suffering of the Achaeans confronts him in concrete form. Patroklos speaks to him in pity, and Eurypylos asks him to conduct him to his tent and look after his wounds. The request puts Patroklos in a bind: is not his goal to return to Achilles and act on Nestor's advice? But the immediacy of Eurypylos' suffering brooks no delay, and he goes with him. The loyal companion of Achilles has become the helper of the Achaeans and in the process has revealed much of his generous and co-operative nature.

When, after many delays, Patroklos reaches Achilles' tent and makes his plea, his friend yields, thereby setting in motion the chain of events that lead to the death of Patroklos and settle the fate not only of Hektor and Troy, but of Achilles as well. The yielding shows Achilles at the deepest point of delusion, and the poet takes care to portray his decision not as a change of heart but as a further development of the state of mind that had first manifested itself in the prayer to Zeus.

Patroklos' plea to Achilles is based on solidarity with the Achaeans, but Achilles responds to his friend's gentle nature rather than to his cause. The response appears in the affectionate banter with which he compares the tears of Patroklos to those of a little girl wanting to be picked up by her mother (16.7). But the woes of the Achaeans leave him untouched, as we learn from the tone of harsh self-righteousness with which he guesses the cause of his friend's tears (16.17) and from the hyperbolic wish that concludes his answer to Patroklos:

> Father Zeus, Athene and Apollo, if only
> not one of all the Trojans could escape destruction, not one
> of the Argives, but you and I could emerge from the slaughter
> so that we two alone could break Troy's hallowed coronal. (16.97–100)

If we hold this conclusion against the image of the crying girl, we see that Achilles is swayed by two powerful emotions – the love of Patroklos and the hatred of the Achaeans – without any awareness of their contradiction. Under the sway of these emotions Achilles projects a vision of the future no less unreal than his flirtation with the pleasures of the unheroic choice. Patroklos is to join the fighting, but he is to stay within certain limits, so as not to threaten the supremacy of Achilles and to ensure his own safety as well. As a consequence the Achaeans will return Briseis and give many other presents besides. The vision concludes with the bizarre image of Patroklos and himself as sole survivors and conquerors of Troy. Reality will refute this vision at every point: Patroklos will not be circumscribed by the role Achilles assigns to him, Achilles will take no pleasure in gifts, and neither Achilles nor Patroklos will be present when Troy is taken.

The continuity of Achilles' behaviour at this point with his previous actions is the explicit subject of one of the most moving scenes in the *Iliad*. When Patroklos has left for battle, Achilles prays for his safe return. Elaborate preparations mark the solemnity of the occasion. From the bottom of a treasure chest given him by Thetis, Achilles fetches a goblet from which only he drinks, and only when sacrificing to Zeus. He cleans the goblet with sulphur and water, washes his hands, and begins his prayer with an invocation as unique as the circumstantiality of the preparatory narrative:

> High Zeus, lord of Dodona, Pelasgian, living afar off,
> brooding over wintry Dodona, your prophets about you
> living, the Selloi who sleep on the ground with feet unwashed.
> Hear me. (16.233–5)

The prayer itself begins with an acknowledgement to Zeus of his previous support and seeks support for the future as well:

> As one time before when I prayed to you, you listened
> and did me honour, and smote strongly the host of the Achaians,
> so one more time bring to pass the wish that I pray for. (16.236–8)

Specifically Achilles prays that Patroklos may win glory and a safe return:

> Let glory, Zeus of the wide brows, go forth with him.
> Make brave the heart inside his breast, so that even Hektor
> will find out whether our henchman knows how to fight his battles
> by himself, or whether his hands rage invincible only

> those times when I myself go into the grind of the war god.
> But when he has beaten back from the ships their clamorous onset,
> then let him come back to me and the running ships, unwounded,
> with all his armour and with the companions who fight close
> beside him. (16.241–8)

Zeus 'granted him one prayer, and denied him the other' (16.250). This supreme moment of Iliadic irony derives its power not merely from the tension between the symmetry of the phrasing and the inequality of what is granted and denied, but from its critical function in the central plot. The Zeus who denies half of Achilles' prayer is the same Zeus who granted the former request, but now he exacts its price. Through the death of Patroklos, Achilles will learn what it means to pray for the destruction of the Achaeans and what it means for such a prayer to be heard.

The blindness of Achilles comes to an abrupt end with the news of Patroklos' death, which is the turning-point of the epic. But, despite his significance, Patroklos does not achieve a fate of his own: rather, his role is to fail in the role of Achilles – a failure foreshadowed by the spear of Achilles, which alone of all of his friend's arms he does not carry into battle (16.140). The life and death of Patroklos are primarily events in the life of Achilles. The poet's constant observance of this perspective accounts for the manner in which he represents the circumstances of his death.

In the famous scene in which Antilochos brings the news of Patroklos' death Achilles is represented as having anticipated the event already in his imagination (18.12). If we return from that scene to our last sight of Achilles, we find him putting the goblet back into its chest and following his friend with his eyes:

> When Achilles had poured the wine and prayed to Zeus father
> he went back into the shelter, stowed the cup in the chest, and came out
> to stand in front of the door, with the desire in his heart still
> to watch the grim encounter of Achaians and Trojans. (16.253–6)

The lines are a discreet reminder of Achilles' anxiety; they also guide the perspective of the reader, who follows Patroklos where Achilles leaves off. The peculiar horror and pathos of Patroklos' death are in good measure a result of the manipulation of the reader's response so that he stands in for Achilles and becomes the witness of the friend's death. From the pursuing glances to the moment of foreboding, Patroklos is never out of the eyes of the reader/Achilles.

In donning the arms of Achilles, Patroklos for a while assumes his invincible strength. He drives the Trojans away from the ships of Protesilaos, cuts off their escape to the city, and wreaks havoc among them. But after his victory over Sarpedon he disregards the explicit advice of

Achilles, goes on the offensive, and in the subsequent attack on Troy loses his life. Patroklos' death is at one level a version of the death of Achilles. The *Iliad* presupposes and repeatedly alludes to the tradition according to which Achilles during an attempt to storm Troy suffered death at the hands of Paris and Apollo, the human and divine archers. The *Iliad* mirrors that tradition when Diomedes, the replacement for Achilles, suffers a non-lethal wound in the heel at the hands of Paris (11.377). Patroklos' death at the hands of Apollo and the brother of Paris is a more serious version of that tradition, a vicarious anticipation of the death of Achilles that permits the poet to incorporate into his epic an event that lies beyond its narrative scope. This procedure underscores the pivotal nature of Patroklos' death: he dies like Achilles because Achilles dies with him. Inseparable in life, their ashes united in a common urn (23.91), their virtual identity also manifests itself in the manner of their death.

While the death of Patroklos anticipates that of Achilles, it also has distinct features of its own, designed to impress on Achilles that Patroklos is the victim of his revenge on the Achaeans. The helpless agony of his last moments is a fitting and horrible conclusion to a heroic career that, despite its temporary glamour, lacks independence. The passive nature of Patroklos, which appeared in his silent listening (9.190) and in his response to Achilles' summons (11.604), manifests itself also in his final glory. The poet could have shown a warrior who in the exultation of victory wilfully and explicitly disregards advice and ventures into a more aggressive role. But Homer represents this transgression as a being drawn; and Patroklos' moment of exultation triggers a reflection on human impotence:

> But Patroklos, with a shout to Automedon and his horses,
> went after Trojans and Lykians in a huge blind fury.
> Besotted: had he only kept the command of Peleiades
> he might have got clear away from the evil spirit of black death.
> But always the mind of Zeus is a stronger thing than a man's mind,
> as now he drove on the fury in the heart of Patroklos.
> Then who was it you slaughtered first, who was the last one,
> Patroklos, as the gods called you to your death? (16.684 93)

In his final assault Patroklos threatens the city itself, which would fall but for the intervention of Apollo. The god rebuffs his attack with words that both differentiate him from and identify him with his greater friend:

> Give way, illustrious Patroklos: it is not destined
> that the city of the proud Trojans shall fall before your spear
> nor even at the hand of Achilleus, who is far better than
> you are. (16.707 9)

From this rebuff the battle moves towards an encounter of Patroklos and

Hektor. The former scores an initial success by killing Hektor's charioteer Kebriones, and a fierce battle ensues over the body of the fallen warrior. At the climactic point of this fight the narrative takes an unexpected turn from what had been a fairly conventional account of battle. Instead of making the defeat of Patroklos depend on an aggressive act by Hektor, the poet makes Apollo intervene directly. He strikes Patroklos from behind with his flat hand and stuns him:

> Apollo now struck away from his head the helmet
> four-horned and hollow-eyed, and under the feet of the horses
> it rolled clattering, and the plumes above it were defiled
> by blood and dust. Before this time it had not been permitted
> to defile in the dust this great helmet crested in horse-hair;
> rather it guarded the head and the gracious brow of a godlike
> man, Achilleus; but now Zeus gave it over to Hektor
> to wear on his head, Hektor whose own death was close to him.
> And in his hands was splintered all the huge, great, heavy,
> iron-shod, far-shadowing spear, and away from his shoulders
> dropped to the ground the shield with its shield sling and its tassels.
> The lord Apollo, son of Zeus, broke the corselet upon him.
> Disaster caught his wits, and his shining body went nerveless.
> (16.793–805)

The helpless terror of the stricken warrior has its only parallel in the *Iliad* in the much briefer account of the panic of Alkathoös, who becomes the victim of Poseidon and Idomeneus (13.436; below, p. 85). But in the case of Patroklos it is not Hektor who, like Idomeneus, takes advantage of the opportunity created by the god. Homer introduces a new character, the young Euphorbos, who wounds Patroklos and then is so terrified even by the naked Patroklos that he immediately retreats to the safety of his comrades. Struck by the god and by Euphorbos, Patroklos finally becomes an easy prey for Hektor (16.818).

The incomprehension and helplessness of Patroklos at the point of death contrast sharply and deliberately with the death of his noblest victim. The function of Sarpedon in the *Iliad* is to provide the career of Patroklos with a suitably climactic achievement. To that purpose he is introduced earlier in the poem as an adversary whose nobility is manifest both in words and deeds. He anticipates Hektor's success in breaching the wall (12.397), and Homer gives to him the most celebrated and complete statement of the warrior's creed (12.310). Sarpedon is a textbook hero, and as such he is also a paradigm of heroic friendship. When he first appears, he kills Tlepolemos but is seriously injured in turn. Immediately his friends surround him; Hektor holds the Achaeans at bay while his friends carry him to an oak-tree where he faints and then recovers (5.663). His famous

speech is addressed to his friend Glaukos, who is far more than a convenient addressee and turns out to be no less essential to the death than to the life of the hero.

Sarpedon attacks Patroklos and is mortally wounded by him. His fall is an important event, marked by two similes and a speech. Apart from Hektor and Patroklos, Sarpedon is the only character to whom the poet gives the power of speech at the moment of death. The most remarkable quality of Sarpedon's final words is their matter-of-factness. He does not express surprise or regret at his fate. He had acknowledged the risk of death in the conclusion of his creed:

> But now, seeing that the spirits of death stand close about us
> in their thousands, no man can turn aside nor escape them,
> let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others. (12.326–8)

When death comes he is ready for it. His final words encourage his friend Glaukos to do what the warrior's code requires on such an occasion: rescue the body (16.492). Having said his piece, he dies, as he lived, by the book, but – and this is the crucial point – protected both in life and in death by his confidence in the presence and help of his friends. That Glaukos will follow the command of his friend goes without saying, but the poet none the less makes a fuss about his compliance. It turns out that Glaukos cannot help Sarpedon because he is still suffering from a hand-wound received earlier in the day. In his despair Glaukos turns to Apollo, who listens to his prayer and instantly heals his wound (16.508). It is not the poet's usual manner to worry about loose ends. Thus the serious thigh-wound of Sarpedon suffered in Book 5 is entirely forgotten in Book 12. Why twenty lines to draw attention to an inconsistency nobody would notice? The answer is surely that the episode serves to foreground the theme of heroic fellowship: if one has to die in battle, then it is best to die like Sarpedon in the company of a friend. The death of Sarpedon underscores the pathos of the death of Patroklos, who dies alone and unexpectedly, confronted with an experience of overwhelming terror. When Achilles blames himself later for not having been at the side of his friend (18.98), the poignancy of that self-accusation is greatly increased by the reader's experience of the contrasting deaths of Sarpedon and Patroklos.

With the death of Patroklos the careers of Hektor and Achilles reach their point of maximum delusion. To Achilles' attempt to prescribe the limits of Patroklos' action corresponds Hektor's boastful triumph over his dying victim:

> Wretch! Achilleus, great as he was, could do nothing to help you.
> When he stayed behind, and you went, he must have said much to you:

> 'Patroklos, lord of horses, see that you do not come back to me
> and the hollow ships, until you have torn in blood the tunic
> of manslaughtering Hektor about his chest.' In some such
> manner he spoke to you, and persuaded the fool's heart in you.
> (16.837–42)

Like Achilles before him, Hektor is wrong on every single point. Patroklos, who in his death regains his mental composure, points this out and predicts Hektor's death at the hands of Achilles (16.844). The words have a chastening effect on Hektor. He does not (how could he?) accept their truth, but neither does he reject them, answering instead with a question to which he pretends the answer is still open:

> Patroklos, what is this prophecy of my headlong destruction?
> Who knows if even Achilleus, son of lovely-haired Thetis,
> might before this be struck by my spear, and his own life
> perish? (16.859–61)

He cannot know that the poet has provided an answer in advance when he describes the moment of Patroklos' death in three lines that he will later use for Hektor as well (16.855–7 = 22.361–3).

Although Achilles has anticipated the death of Patroklos in his imagination, the violence of his response is in no way diminished. He is so wild in the expression of his grief that his mother hears him in the depth of the sea. She comes to comfort him and undertakes to ask Hephaistos for a new armour to replace the one lost by Patroklos. This is the second visit she pays to Achilles. She will come a third time to bring the order of the gods that Hektor should be ransomed. The visits of Thetis articulate the turning-points of Achilles' career and establish relations between them. This is especially true of the second visit, in which Achilles recognises the death of his friend as the consequence of his prayer to Zeus. The theme of connection, to borrow E. M. Forster's phrase in *Howards End*, is sounded in Thetis' first words. Not only are her opening words the same as on the previous occasion (18.73–4 = 1.362–3), but she also refers explicitly to the fulfilment of Achilles' request, echoing with slight changes the original wording:

> These things are brought to accomplishment
> through Zeus: in the way that you lifted your hands and prayed for,
> that all the sons of the Achaians be pinned on their grounded vessels
> by reason of your loss, and suffer things that are shameful.
> (18.74–7; cf. 1.409)

As in the description of Zeus' response to Achilles' second prayer, formal

identity points to substantive difference. But Achilles is no longer blind, and his response names the difference:

> My mother, all these things the Olympian brought to accomplishment.
> But what pleasure is this to me, since my dear companion has perished,
> Patroklos, whom I loved beyond all other companions,
> as well as my own life. (18.79–82)

From the fact of Patroklos' death arises the need to avenge him even at the cost of his own life. For the first time, Achilles has a vision of his complete destiny, moving back in time to the wedding of his parents when the gods gave Peleus the arms that his greater son would bear (18.83), and looking forward to his death, which he accepts as the consequence of his revenge on Hektor:

> I must die soon, then; since I was not to stand by my companion
> when he was killed. And now, far away from the land of his fathers,
> he has perished, and lacked my fighting strength to defend him.
> Now, since I am not going back to the beloved land of my fathers,
> since I was no light of safety to Patroklos, nor to my other
> companions, who in their numbers went down before glorious Hektor,
> but sit here beside my ships, a useless weight on the good
> land . . . (18.98–104)

Here the poet reaps the reward of his strategy of emphasising the gentleness of Patroklos and the helpless terror of his death: Achilles' words would not resonate so strongly if we did not remember Patroklos tending to the injured Eurypylos and later naked and bewildered by the stroke of the god. The two images lend weight to the moment when Achilles recognises the implications of having asked for the suffering of the Achaeans, whom in retrospect he identifies, together with Patroklos, as his 'companions'.

The death of Patroklos turns the blind into a seeing Achilles. For the rest of his brief life he will act in a state of clairvoyance that is given to other characters only at the point of death. The gain of this clairvoyance is the ultimate reason for the strategy of deferring the death of Achilles beyond the end of the narrative and refracting it in the death of Patroklos. Heroic action gains its value from the risk of death. But death stands in a paradoxical relation to experience. What we call human experience in the fullest sense requires two conditions: the event must be given immediately to its subject, and the subject must be capable of continuing reflection on it. The experience of death does not meet both conditions. One's own death puts an end to reflection, and that of another lacks immediacy. The literary convention of the death speech is clearly an attempt to bridge the gap between reflection and immediate sensation. The words of a dying

character have a special authority because we pretend that they are spoken out of the immediate experience of death. But the convention has intrinsic limits. The death speech cannot be long, or its duration will undermine the fiction that makes the convention possible.

Homer uses the convention of the death speech for Sarpedon, Patroklos and Hektor. But for his protagonist he resorted to a fiction that provided him with richer opportunities to express the consciousness of death. Achilles witnesses and reflects on the death of Patroklos-as-Achilles. He experiences his own death as if it were that of another. The fiction depends on the reader's belief in the identity of Achilles and Patroklos. Once established, the fiction allows for a much wider range of representational devices, for it creates a hero who can be treated as if he were dead not only in his dying moments.

The death of Achilles begins with the news of Patroklos' death. One of the most attractive speculations about narrative sources of the *Iliad* holds that Achilles' initial response and Thetis' subsequent visit are modelled on an account of Achilles' death (Kakridis, 67–70). When Achilles hears the words of Antilochos he is prostrate with grief: *autos d'en koniēisi megas megalōsti tanustheis/keito* ('and he himself, mightily in his might, in the dust lay at length', 18.26–7). A slight rearrangement of that phrase, *keito megas megalōsti* ('he lay mightily in his might') occurs in the Patrokleia (16.776), where it refers to the body of Kebriones, and in the second underworld scene of the *Odyssey*, where it refers to the dead Achilles (24.40). When Thetis arrives she cradles her son's head in her hands in a gesture reminiscent of ritual mourning (18.71). Add to this Antilochos' fear that Achilles will kill himself (18.34), and you have fairly suggestive evidence that the scene in which Achilles learns about the death of his friend is modelled on a scene in which he is treated as a corpse.

Because Achilles has 'already died', prophecies do not disturb him. When his horses at Hera's command foretell his death he replies with weary indignation that he need not be told what he already knows (19.420). He foresees his own death in the Lykaon scene, and when the dying Hektor gives the most precise account of his imminent death at the hands of Paris and Apollo (22.359) he replies: So be it. Finally, Achilles always thinks of the funeral for Patroklos as a funeral for himself as well (23.141, 243).

As a result of Patroklos' death the heroic energy of Achilles is no longer turned inward against his own comrades as a *mēnis oulomenē*, but turns against Hektor, his destined enemy. The return is more than a restoration. Achilles' anger grew as it swerved from its proper object, and in its return it burns with even greater intensity. When Thetis brings the weapons of Hephaistos, their glare frightens the Myrmidons, who do not dare look at them:

> Only Achilleus
> looked, and as he looked the anger came harder upon him

and his eyes glittered terribly under his lids, like sunflare. (19.15–17)

He has found an answer to the question first asked in Book 1 and repeated in Book 9: What have the Trojans done to me? The war has acquired a cause that concerns him and only him. Yeats, who often used Greece as a metaphor for Ireland, said in 'Easter 1916': 'A terrible beauty is born.' The oxymoron is singularly appropriate to the status of Achilles once he re-enters battle. He stands in the shadow of death, and the poet surrounds him with an aura that marks him off from all others. But, although no human adversary can resist or escape Achilles, even his course of victory is not without obstacles, and it is precisely at the point at which he rages with an elemental force that he meets the most radical threat to his heroic destiny. In the most daring 'almost' of the poem he is confronted with the indignity of death by water.

The threat occurs at a morally significant point. Achilles has pursued the Trojans into the river that is reddened by the blood of his victims. There is no comparable image of carnage in the *Iliad*, but the slaughter is not the ultimate expression of Achilles' violence. He takes twelve prisoners alive to be sacrificed at the grave of Patroklos (21.26). More than even the most violent form of battle death, the stylised ritual of that sacrifice expresses the extremity to which Achilles has been driven by his grief. The very formlessness of death by water may be a response to that stylisation. The river pursues Achilles and undercuts his very being. He who is 'swift of foot' not only must use his feet in flight rather than pursuit, but the river attacks the source of his strength and makes him lose the ground under his feet (21.269). Never before has Achilles suffered such helplessness, and in his appeal to Zeus he envisages an unheroic end far worse than his fantasies about returning to Phthia:

> But now this is a dismal death I am doomed to be caught in,
> trapped in a big river as if I were boy and a swineherd
> swept away by a torrent when he tries to cross in a
> rainstorm. (21.281–3)

At this point the poem touches for a moment on the mythical and supernatural sphere. Achilles is not a monster-slayer like Beowulf. Heroes of that type are familiar to the *Iliad*, but they belong to a past from which the epic distances itself. Achilles' return to battle, however, involves a deliberate straining of natural limits. The hero's arms are made and brought to him by gods. His horses speak to him. And Achilles emanates a terror that is systematically associated with many forms of fire (below, pp. 111–12). Because Achilles is a kind of fire he is threatened most radically by water, and aid comes to him from the god of fire himself, not in his guise as master-craftsman but in his elemental shape. The river, though it

comes close to extinguishing the fire of Achilles, is no match for the fire god himself and, as in the other instances of 'almost', the narrative rebounds from its false turn and moves towards its resolution with greater force. Will Hektor be a match for an Achilles whose fire has successfully defied the quenching power of water?

HEKTOR AFTER THE DEATH OF PATROKLOS

Whereas through much of the *Iliad* the courses of Achilles and Hektor converge on paths of error, Achilles' recognition changes the pattern of convergence. Hektor's confidence at the end of Book 8 corresponds to Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's offer. Achilles' vision of himself and Patroklos as sole conquerors of Troy is mirrored in Hektor's deluded words to the dying Patroklos. But Hektor's recognition lags behind that of Achilles, which produces for a while the contrast between a seeing Achilles and a blind Hektor. The contrast appears most fully in the second assembly of the Trojans.

Night has fallen, and once more the Trojans assemble outside the walls of the city. But everything has changed. The mere appearance of Achilles has routed the Trojans and has caused them to abandon the body of Patroklos. No fires flare to express their confidence; instead we learn that they are too frightened to sit down (18.246). Poulydamas gives sound advice, as he had done in Book 12, and counsels retreat under the cover of night. Once again Hektor contemptuously rejects his cousin's advice, showing an intransigence in the face of changed circumstances very similar to Achilles' behaviour in the Embassy. If Achilles had indeed returned to battle – as if any doubt were possible about the apparition that routed them:

> the worse for him if he tries it, since I for my part
> will not run from him out of the sorrowful battle, but rather
> stand fast, to see if he wins the great glory, or if I can win it.
> The war god is impartial. Before now he has killed the
> killer. (18.306–9)

This is less of a prediction of victory than his previous boast that he would kill Diomedes, but it is just as discrepant with the reality that gives the lie to it.

When the rout of the Trojans is complete, Hektor alone does not return to the safety of the city:

> But his deadly fate held Hektor shackled, so that he stood fast
> in front of Ilion and the Skaian gates. (22.5–6)

This is exactly the same place where, according to Achilles' words to

Odysseus, he had once before braved Achilles – and had barely escaped (9.354). Whereas on that occasion the Skaian gates had marked the farthest point of Hektor's courage, now they mark the closest point to safety and measure no longer his daring but his retreat from the open field of battle that in the exuberance of victory he had claimed as his true home (15.720). On the borderline between the security of the walls and the danger of the open field, Hektor must make a choice. His parents beg him in the strongest terms to return to the city and to think of his obligation as the protector of Troy (22.37). But he is unmoved. His subsequent soliloquy, the longest such speech in the *Iliad*, expresses the reasons why he cannot return to his former role (22.99–130). He does not at any point deal with the arguments raised by his parents, and his deafness to them may itself be a telling index of the degree to which he is trapped by his previous choices, which he now recognises as mistakes blocking his return. We may remember the Trojan women thronging Hektor upon his return to Troy asking anxiously about the fate of their sons, brothers and husbands. What is he to tell them now? Better to face Achilles in honourable defeat (110) than to live with the reproaches of his inferiors: 'Hektor believed in his own strength and ruined his people' (107). But Hektor's resolution is not very firm. Odysseus in a similar situation had considered flight only to reject it by reminding himself of the warrior code:

> Yet still, why does the heart within me debate on these things?
> Still I know that it is the cowards who walk out of the fighting,
> but if one is to win honour in battle, he must by all means
> stand his ground strongly, whether he be struck or strike down another. (11.407–10)

Hektor, on the other hand, looks for ways out. It is only the impossibility of finding such a way that makes him stand. Thus his first decision to face Achilles (109) gives way to an imagined negotiation: should he take off his arms, promise to return Helen, and share the treasures of Troy with the Achaeans? To imagine the solution is to discover its impossibility:

> I might go up to him, and he take no pity upon me
> nor respect my position, but kill me naked so, as if I were
> a woman, once I stripped my armour from me. (22.123–5)

It is striking that Hektor does not refer to Patroklos at this point, although it is Patroklos rather than Helen who has become the *casus belli* for Achilles. But the poet may remember Patroklos: had not Hektor killed him naked and helpless (16.815)? For a second time Hektor resolves to confront Achilles, but in the face of his approach his resolution buckles and he runs away.

James Redfield (p. 128) has interpreted Hektor's decision to await

Achilles as his third and final error: having first decided to go on the offensive (Book 8), and having decided not to retreat after the death of Patroklos, Hektor now fails to return to the safety of the city. Redfield writes with great insight of the disjunction between heroic identity and social obligation that defeat creates for the warrior: while his defeat has proved him 'not to be what he claimed to be' (p. 154), his protective function still remains necessary to his community. But for some heroes, as for Hektor, the balancing act of weighing present loss against future usefulness becomes impossible. Redfield sees Hektor's decision to face Achilles as a sign of Hektor's inability to take the longer view of things that springs from greater self-assurance. But what obsesses Hektor's consciousness is less the fact of defeat than the recognition that defeat is the consequence of his folly. Not unlike Achilles, who discovers the connection between his anger and the death of Patroklos, he sees himself as the prisoner of his previous decisions. In both cases the acknowledgement of past error leads to the discovery of the single remaining path of action. Thus it does not seem right to speak of Hektor's choice as a new and additional error. He correctly recognises that his past actions have blocked his return to the city. The fact that this recognition takes place immediately outside the gate is deeply ironic. But the open gate does not, like the advice of Poulydamas, point to a road Hektor should have taken. For that it is too late.

Hektor's disillusionment, unlike that of Achilles, does not occur in a single moment of radical insight; it is a process that for a while even breeds new delusions. His recognition of past errors and their consequences does show him the only way that remains open, but his ability to go that way depends on the continuing delusion that he might be equal to Achilles. The two moments of resolution in his speech (22.109, 130) leave the outcome of their encounter in doubt, and this hope, rather than the decision to stay, represents Hektor's continuing error.

Hektor's flight, like that of Achilles from the river, tests the limits of the hero's existence. Achilles learns about a world of natural forces to which human heroism is irrelevant. Hektor's lesson is more obviously a moral one: in his flight he recognises the false premisses of the new role that he had claimed for himself outside the walls of Troy. Hektor does not justify his flight (as Menelaos justifies his retreat from the body of Patroklos). It overcomes him, and it is in a peculiar sense his first honest act. For this reason the poet's restoration of Hektor begins with what is on the surface an act of shameful cowardice. Homer does not blame Hektor for running away. Instead he transforms what might be an abject spectacle into a noble competition in which one competitor is worthy (*esthlos*), but the other far better (*meg' ameinōn*), and in which the trophy is far more valuable than the usual bull's hide or ritual beast, for it is the life of Hektor (22.158). The prestige of the competition is enhanced by the fact that the gods themselves – all of them – act as spectators (22.166).

The transition from race to fight recapitulates the delusion to which Hektor had been prone and lays the foundation for the final moment of recognition. In the terror of his isolation Hektor hears the voice of Deïphobos – the disguise Athene has adopted to carry out the resolution of the gods that Hektor should die. Deïphobos/Athene promises help in standing up to Achilles (22.229). It is a common tactic for one warrior to come to the help of another in confronting a superior enemy. Thus, Aeneas and Pandaros fight Diomedes (5.166), Diomedes and Nestor fight Hektor (8.99), Menelaos and Antilochos fight Aeneas (5.561). What makes this scene so special (and Athene's appeal so treacherous) is the fact that the offer of heroic fellowship comes to a warrior who has experienced the terror of isolation in the most excruciating form. When Deïphobos/Athene tells Hektor that he has ventured outside the walls despite the pleas of Priam and Hekabe, the words cannot fail to impress Hektor, who has just rejected similar pleas.

Athene's cruel lie makes the courage of Hektor possible and his death inevitable. Readers have often found difficulty with her role in the death of Hektor since it goes beyond the assistance that gods give to their favourites. There are, however, good reasons for Athene's extraordinary intervention. First, the fact that Hektor's final courage rests on a false premiss echoes and crystallises the condition of Hektor's career throughout the poem. This is an instance of the poetic justice that establishes a significant relationship between a character's life and the mode of his death. Second, the deluded courage of Hektor yields to true courage in the end. When his spear has failed to pierce Achilles' armour, Hektor asks Deïphobos for another spear. But he is gone. Now the poet could have plunged Hektor into a new panic, but instead he endows him with a knowledge that is instantaneous, comprehensive, and leads to a resolution that no longer requires the treacherous support of hope:

> No use. Here at last the gods have summoned me deathward.
> I thought Deïphobos the hero was here close beside me,
> but he is behind the wall and it was Athene cheating me,
> and now evil death is close to me, and no longer far away,
> and there is no way out. So it must long since have been pleasing
> to Zeus, and Zeus' son who strikes from afar, this way; though
> before this
> they defended me gladly. But now my death is upon me.
> Let me at least not die without a struggle, inglorious,
> but do some big thing first, that men to come shall know of
> it. (22.297–305)

The words receive additional depth from a powerful verbal correspondence with the Patrokleia. When Homer introduces its last act he asks:

> Then who was it you slaughtered first, who was the last one,
> Patroklos, as the gods called you to your death? (16.692–3)

What Homer says about Patroklos, Hektor says about himself. The simple change of pronoun distinguishes the pathos of Patroklos' end from the heroic defeat of Hektor. At this moment, and only at this moment, Hektor is equal to Achilles, and superior to all other Iliadic characters, in the depth and intensity of his consciousness of life as limited and valorised by the fact of death.

THE DEATH OF HEKTOR AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE ILIAD

The death of Hektor requires an interpretation at three levels. First, it is the end to his individual career. Since the poet marked the beginning of that career in the encounter with Andromache, he returns to that beginning at the point of death. Andromache's reaction to her husband's death brings to a close the initial mourning for Hektor and does so in a manner that recalls their encounter in Book 6. Second, the death of Hektor stands for the end of the war. This aspect is represented through an elaborate set of correspondences that relate the duel of Achilles and Hektor to a montage of the beginning of the war represented in Books 2–5. At the third level, the death of Hektor generates a new action that has to do with the maltreatment of his body, his ransom and his funeral. This action, through an elaborate set of formal correspondences, reaches back to the events of the first book and establishes an ultimate frame of anger and reconciliation. The story of Hektor, Patroklos and Achilles thus has a triple frame, which defines the story, expands it and gives to it both the narrative and thematic comprehensiveness that turn it into a poem deserving of the title 'Iliad'.

One may see in this frame a monumental application of 'ring composition', a device that consists of marking the end of a passage by a repetition of its beginning: A B C D A. The device is common in Homeric speeches and often takes more complicated forms, as when the poet approaches a central passage in one order and leads away from it in reverse order: A B C D C B A. The centre of such a passage is like the turning-post in an ancient chariot race, and Lohmann (p. 15) points out that the most elaborate example of ring composition in a Homeric speech occurs in Nestor's advice to Antilochos on how to win a chariot race, with the centre taken up by a description of the turning-post (23.306). Cedric Whitman has seen the entire *Iliad* as an application of this design, which he relates to the geometric art of the eighth century. Whether one speaks of ring composition or geometric structure, it is important to recognise that the design has a dramatic function: the balance of correspondences points

inward towards a pivot, whether it is the turning-point of the racecourse, or, as in the entire *Iliad*, the death of Patroklos.

HEKTOR AND ANDROMACHE

Andromache frames the individual career of Hektor that stretches from his departure from Troy to his encounter with Achilles. Her response to her husband's death is ironically related to her anxieties on the earlier occasion. There she had feared for his life, and like a madwoman (*mainomenēi eïkuia*) had rushed to the towers (6.389). After returning home, she had mourned Hektor as if he were already dead. But now she is lost in the peace of domestic work: she is weaving while water is heating on a tripod for a bath on his return:

> poor innocent, nor knew how, far from waters for bathing,
> Pallas Athene had cut him down at the hands of Achilleus. (22.445–6)

The noise of the mourners, among which she distinguishes the voice of Hekabe, brings the idyll to an abrupt end. Once more she rushes to the towers 'like a raving woman with a pulsing heart' (*mainadi isē/pallomenē kradiēn*, 22.460–1), and she arrives in time to see Hektor's body being dragged towards the ships:

> The darkness of night misted over the eyes of Andromache.
> She fell backward, and gasped the life breath from her, and far off
> threw from her head the shining gear that ordered her headdress,
> the diadem and the cap, and the holding-band woven together,
> and the circlet, which Aphrodite the golden once had given her
> on that day when Hektor of the shining helmet led her forth
> from the house of Eëtion, and gave numberless gifts to win
> her. (22.466–72)

The description of her reaction is among the most poignant instances of the Homeric technique of evoking the beginning at the end, and it derives much of its power from Andromache's words in Book 6, where she had seen herself as the sole survivor of a family destroyed by Achilles. The logic of her words then finds its fulfilment now when she sees that Achilles has taken the one Hektor who remained to her. When she regains consciousness, her own words confirm the fatal links between Thebe and Troy:

> Hektor, I grieve for you. You and I were born to a single
> destiny, you in Troy in the house of Priam, and I
> in Thebe, underneath the timbered mountain of Plakos

in the house of Eëtion, who cared for me when I was little,
ill-fated he, I ill-starred. I wish he had never begotten me. (22.477–81)

THE TROJAN WAR: BEGINNING AND END

The immensely moving story of individual death and bereavement is embedded in a wider frame that articulates the collective fate of Troy and explores the relationship between the cause and consequences of the war. As a proleptic image of the fall of Troy the death of Hektor contrasts systematically with a montage of the beginning of the war that is found in the duel of Paris and Menelaos and in the breaking of the truce.

Instead of telling the story of the Trojan war in chronological order the *Iliad* focuses on a decisive event in the final phase of the war. But, since the withdrawal of Achilles in Book 1 creates a narrative gap, the poet fills that gap with events that stand for the beginning of the war, thus creating the illusion that his narrative, in tracing the events from the anger of Achilles to the death of Hektor, also traces the course of the entire war from beginning to end. This peculiar sleight of hand begins with the marshalling and roll-call of the army in the second book. As the Achaean and Trojan armies move towards one another, Paris proposes to decide the war by means of a duel. Menelaos accepts the offer as a rational way of settling their conflict without bringing additional sufferings on others (3.98). While the preparations for the duel are under way Helen appears on the walls and answers Priam's questions about the identity of various heroes. After the Achaeans and Trojans have sworn solemn oaths to respect the outcome of the duel, the fighting begins. Menelaos has the upper hand but Aphrodite snatches Paris from the battlefield before he is injured and takes him to his bedroom. Then she compels Helen to return to Paris. While the two make love and re-enact the original offence, Agamemnon claims victory and demands Helen's extradition.

The events of this exposition fit the first year of the war much better than the tenth. Priam asking Helen about the identity of Agamemnon is only the most obvious anachronism; the entire idea of restricting the conflict to those with a direct interest is also more appropriate to an early phase of the war. Narrative convenience has a part in the poet's decision to equate the beginning of his narrative with the beginning of the story, but his purpose goes beyond clarity of exposition. We get a glimpse of this purpose if we follow the order of events beyond the inconclusive duel and analyse correspondences between them and the death of Hektor.

The impasse produced by Aphrodite's capricious rescue of Paris is broken by Athene and Zeus in a manner that looks forward to their role in the death of Hektor. When the gods witness the race of Achilles and Hektor, Zeus remembers the piety of the latter and wonders whether the gods should save him. But he yields to Athene's protests and dispatches

her to bring about Hektor's death. In the opening scene of Book 4 a similar sequence is developed in fuller detail. Zeus 'teases' Hera and Athene, who have done so much less than the unwarlike Aphrodite to help their protégé Menelaos. He asks whether Troy should be saved – a question that produces a bitter outburst from Hera (4.25). Once again Zeus yields, but not without regret at the fate of a Troy that has been, like Hektor, punctilious in its sacrifices to him (4.48). He sends Athene down to the field to break the truce. As in the death of Hektor, Athene uses deception to carry out her task. She persuades the foolish archer Pandaros to take a shot at Menelaos in the hope of gaining glory among the Trojans – a deluded enterprise given the express hatred of the Trojans for Paris (3.320). Athene deflects the arrow from Menelaos so that he receives only a minor injury. Agamemnon solemnly declares the truce broken and predicts the fall of Troy. Pandaros does not long survive his treacherous act. Diomedes kills him with a spear guided by Athene (5.290).

Pandaros is a composite character, combining elements of Paris and Hektor. Like Paris he is an archer. His injury to Menelaos causes the war to begin again. His death resembles that of Hektor, for he falls at the hands of the Achilles substitute and with the assistance of Athene. The fate of Pandaros is a foreshortened image of the war as a whole, linking its beginning to its end. It also points to a crucial theme of the *Iliad* in its linkage of Paris and Hektor: the war is not decided by, nor its suffering restricted to, those who caused it. The *Iliad* sees war as a phenomenon that spreads beyond its cause; indeed, the poet goes farther and holds that war does not come into its own until its 'original' cause is lost.

The duel of Paris and Menelaos, instead of settling the war, leads to a re-enactment of the original offence. Paris makes love to Helen, while his substitute injures Menelaos on the battlefield. But the war that begins with the broken truce is fiercer than the war that preceded it. The bow-shot of Pandaros marks the beginning of a new era and is analogous to the death of Patroklos, which marks the beginning of the war for Achilles. The poet emphasises the relationship between these two pivotal events through the peculiar role that Menelaos plays in the rescue of the body of Patroklos. Menelaos is the first Achaean to arrive at the body of Patroklos. He stands over the body 'as over a first-born calf the mother cow stands lowing, she who has known no children before this' (17.4). The image is profoundly ironic. Patroklos is indeed the first child of war, the first victim whose death really matters, and Menelaos has given birth to it. The poet seems to honour Menelaos by making him be on the spot and protect his fallen friend against the attack of Euphorbos. But is not the dead Patroklos a rebuke to the living Menelaos? The irony deepens when Menelaos falters at the approach of Hektor and considers his choices. He recognises that Patroklos died for his cause (17.92), but persuades himself that the odds justify his retreat. There is no parallel to such calculating prudence in the

Iliad, and it contrasts both with the reckless enthusiasm that drove Patroklos towards his death and with the absolute commitment of Achilles to risk certain death in avenging his friend.

The poet is not particularly interested in blackening the reputation of Menelaos. He shows him as well-meaning and valiant (up to a point), but inadequate to the events unleashed by his marriage with Helen. Even his reminder that Patroklos died for his cause is out of place: he does not understand that with the death of Patroklos the war ceases to be about Helen. The poet gives his measure of Menelaos by giving him prominence in a context most likely to reveal his limitations.

ACHILLES AND PRIAM

Contrary to romantic clichés about heroism, the Homeric warrior is not the opposite of the haggling shopkeeper. Exchange, negotiation of disputes, and settlements are honourable transactions in the Homeric world, to be carried both with a keen calculation of material advantage and with a deep sense of ceremony. What characterises the action of the *Iliad*, however, is the progressive collapse of established procedures for resolving conflicts. This collapse begins with the Chryses episode in Book 1, continues with the broken truce and the failure of the Embassy, and leads, beyond the confines of the narrative, to the ruin of Troy, which the tradition viewed as a catastrophe for the conquerors no less than for the vanquished. Within the narrative, the ultimate point of this collapse is Achilles' maltreatment of Hektor's body. But the *Iliad* recoils from this extremity and concludes with a transaction that arrests, if only temporarily, the progress towards chaos: Achilles accepts ransom from Priam in exchange for the body of Hektor. The ransoming of Hektor mirrors and elaborates the ransoming of Chryseis. Thus the violence and chaos of the action are enclosed by a narrative frame that moves from chaos to the order of ceremonious exchange. At this third and ultimate level of interpretation, the death of Hektor is not an end, but a beginning.

The collapse of a world based on rational exchange is the central theme of the speeches that frame the duel of Hektor and Achilles. Hektor offers a contract with the gods as witness: the victor will strip the vanquished of his armour but should return the body itself. In view of the gods' failure to enforce the contract between Paris and Menelaos, the appeal to the gods (22.254) has an ironic ring, and Achilles will have none of it: 'Hektor, argue me no agreements. I cannot forgive you' (22.261). The word for 'agreement', *sunhēmosunē*, which occurs only here in Homer and is very rare in later literature, is clearly a derivative of *sunhiēmi*, 'to understand'. The choice of the word may indicate that an 'understanding' in the sense of settlement is an innate aspect of human nature. Achilles' explanation of his refusal is highly significant:

> As there are no trustworthy oaths between men and lions,
> nor wolves and lambs have spirit that can be brought to agreement
> but forever these hold feelings of hate for each other,
> so there can be no love between you and me, nor shall there be
> oaths between us. (22.262–6)

The words rest on the premiss that the enmity of Hektor and Achilles has cancelled the species bond that makes contracts possible. The cancellation of that bond is more explicit when the mortally wounded Hektor returns to the same theme. He no longer offers a contract (how could he?), but instead supplicates Achilles to accept ransom for his body. The greater intensity of the request meets with an even harsher refusal:

> No more entreating of me, you dog, by knees or parents.
> I wish only that my spirit and fury would drive me
> to hack your meat away and eat it raw for the things that
> you have done to me. So there is no one who can hold the dogs off
> from your head, not if they bring here and set before me ten times
> and twenty times the ransom, and promise more in addition,
> not if Priam son of Dardanos should offer to weigh out
> your bulk in gold; not even so shall the lady your mother
> who herself bore you lay you on the death-bed and mourn you:
> no, but the dogs and the birds will have you all for their
> feasting. (22.345–54)

Achilles goes beyond the animal comparisons of his previous speech and seeks to transform himself and Hektor into animals for whom implacable hostility is a natural condition. This is the second time in the poem that the motif of cannibalism appears, and on both occasions it serves as a counter-image to the world of covenants. In the deliberations about the truce Zeus had said that only by eating the raw flesh of Priam and his children could Hera quench her hatred of the Trojans (4.34). The motif will occur once more when Hekabe vainly seeks to dissuade Priam from his journey to Achilles and wishes she could eat his liver (24.212). The motif traces the progress of savagery from the broken truce through the death of Patroklos to the mutilation of Hektor's body. At the same time, in its second and third occurrences it marks a turning-point. Achilles may refuse to entertain the thought of accepting ransom for Hektor in language as hyperbolic as his rejection of Agamemnon's gifts, but through his words the poet looks forward to what will happen.

Achilles' rejection of Hektor's supplication and his subsequent maltreatment of the body lie outside the norms of the warrior code, but they are not unexpected. They are anticipated by the three suppliant episodes of Books 6, 11, 21. In the first of these, Menelaos captures Adrestos and is on the point of honouring his ransom offer when Agamemnon intervenes:

> Dear brother, o Menelaos, are you concerned so tenderly
> with these people? Did you in your house get the best of treatment
> from the Trojans? No, let not one of them go free of sudden
> death and our hands; not the young man child that the mother carries
> still in her body, not even he, but let all of Ilion's
> people perish, utterly blotted out and unmourned for. (6.55–60)

The poet calls Agamemnon's words 'just', perhaps because of the blatant injustice the Trojans have committed in breaking the truce. In other circumstances, Menelaos' action would have been proper, but Agamemnon draws attention to the changed nature of the war. His savage threat against the unborn child is deliberately placed by the poet in a context that will soon see Hektor among the women of Troy. A repetition of this incident occurs in Book 11, where the sons of Antimachos, a prominent supporter of Paris, supplicate Agamemnon but meet with no success, since he remembers the special wrong their father has done to Menelaos (11.138).

The final and by far the most elaborate suppliant episode is the encounter of Lykaon and Achilles in Book 21. It differs from the others in that the rejection of the supplication turns on the death of Patroklos rather than on the offence to Menelaos. It also makes explicit the premiss that a suppliant can normally expect a favourable response. The poet reports that Lykaon had once before been captured by Achilles, who had saved his life and sold him to Lemnos, where he had regained his freedom and via a curiously circuitous route had found his way back to Troy. The Achilles he now encounters is much changed and wonders with mock astonishment how it was possible for Lykaon to return across the hostile sea. Now he will send him on another voyage to find out

> whether he will come back even from there, or the prospering
> earth will hold him, she who holds back even the strong man. (21.62–3)

To this implacable and sardonic Achilles, Lykaon addresses a half-hearted supplication, of which he himself seems to recognise the futility and which culminates in a vain attempt to dissociate himself from his half-brother Hektor. But, like Agamemnon, Achilles refuses to make distinctions: all Trojans are the objects of his wrath, and in particular all the sons of Priam. He begins his rejection with an emphatic statement of the contrast between now and then. He did indeed spare the lives of his prisoners 'in the time before Patroklos came to the day of his destiny' (21.100), but now nobody will escape him. He dispatches Lykaon with a sword, throws his body into the river, and exults at the prospect of fish nibbling away at it.

With its sharp division of the world into before and after the death of Patroklos, the Lykaon episode seems to express most fully the dynamic of

events in the Trojan war. It looks back to a world in which norms of rational exchange prevailed even in war; it manifests the irrelevance of these norms to a world of savage and destructive anger. The Achilles who refuses to speak of covenants and will maltreat the body of Hektor is clearly the same Achilles who throws Lykaon to the fish. From this perspective, the mutilation of Hektor's corpse is the logical outcome of the plot of the *Iliad*, and one could imagine a poem that ends with a vision of destruction. The proemium does indeed foreshadow such an ending when it describes the denial of burial as the consequence of Achilles' anger. But the *Iliad* does not end this way; it ends, on the contrary, with a spectacular scene of reconciliation in which two men destined by their history to implacable enmity not only restore the possibility of rational exchange, but also discover a human solidarity through their respective status of bereaved father and doomed son.

The first inkling of this return occurs paradoxically in the Lykaon scene, where embedded in the scornful words and deeds of Achilles there is a moment of chilling serenity when he sees Lykaon, Patroklos and himself as united by a common fate:

> So, friend, you die also. Why all this clamour about it?
> Patroklos also is dead, who was better by far than you are.
> Do you not see what a man I am, how huge, how splendid
> and born of a great father, and the mother who bore me immortal?
> Yet even I have also my death and my strong destiny,
> and there shall be a dawn or an afternoon or a noontime
> when some man in the fighting will take the life from me also
> either with a spearcast or an arrow flown from the
> bowstring. (21.106–13)

Unknown to Achilles, the startling address *philos*, 'friend', looks beyond his words to Hektor: *hōs ouk est' eme kai se philēmenai* ('since you and I cannot be *philoi*', 22.265). To be somebody's *philos* refers to kinship or equivalent ties that exist quite independently of feeling or love, although they are usually accompanied by it. In his encounter with Lykaon, Achilles discovers what he will momentarily and savagely deny in the encounter with Hektor: the common humanity of victor and vanquished. The Achilles of the Lykaon scene is already in some sense the Achilles of the Priam scene. The sublimity of the scene, which virtually every reader of the *Iliad* has acknowledged, arises from the extreme dissonance of cruel scorn and sympathetic understanding, a dissonance that the subsequent narrative will resolve in one direction.

The finale of the *Iliad* systematically reverses the events of the beginning.

(1)	Agamemnon denies ransom request by Chryses. *Apollo intervenes.* Nine-day plague and burning of the dead. Assembly on tenth day. Quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles. Removal of Briseis.	Achilles grants ransom request by Priam. Achilles reunited with Briseis. Nine-day preparation for Hektor's funeral. Burning of pyre on tenth day.
(2)	Achilles sends request to Zeus via Thetis.	Zeus sends request to Achilles via Thetis.
(3)	Twelve-day interval (ceremonious return of Chryseis). Thetis secretly persuades Zeus. Hera accuses Zeus. Their quarrel reconciled by Hephaistos.	Twelve-day maltreatment of Hector's corpse. *Apollo intervenes.* Hera's last protest overruled by Zeus. Thetis summoned and publicly welcomed by Hera and Athene.

The movement from disorder to order implicit in this narrative framework is anticipated in the first book, which closes with the reconciliation of the gods. Their quarrel is resolved by Hephaistos, and our final vision of the gods in Book 1 is dominated by divine laughter, the lyre of Apollo and the song of the Muses. The resolution of Book 1, however, does not resolve the quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles, which comes to a formal end in Book 19, where Agamemnon apologises and Achilles accepts the gifts he had so violently rejected in the Embassy. But that resolution no longer matters, and it establishes no closure because, while bringing to an end one form of Achilles' anger, it only intensifies another. As the formal correspondences between the first and last books make clear, the quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles does not find its true resolution until the dishonouring of Chryses by Agamemnon is balanced by the honour Achilles shows to Priam.

The nature of that resolution and its significance for the interpretation of the work as a whole are not easy to describe, and readings of the last book have run the gamut from seeing in it no more than a tagged-on ending to interpreting it as a profound revaluation of the warrior code. Assuming an integral function for the last book, a minimal reading would hold that the violation and restoration of order leave Achilles and Priam with a more explicit understanding of the values of their society. Such a view is compatible with the fact that the ransom transactions of the first and last books are in principle identical even though the characters differ in status and significance. But it is also possible to argue that the words of Priam and Achilles display an ethos in which the values of the warrior society are transcended. This view receives powerful support from the surprises and the reversals that inform the last encounter. No two men have more reason to hate one another, and yet Priam becomes a suppliant to Achilles. Undetected by mortal eyes, he suddenly appears in the tent of Achilles:

> Tall Priam
> came in unseen by the other men and stood close beside him
> and caught the knees of Achilleus in his arms, and kissed the hands
> that were dangerous and manslaughtering and had killed so many
> of his sons. As when dense disaster closes on one who has murdered
> a man in his own land, and he comes to the country of others,
> to a man of substance, and wonder seizes on those who behold him,
> so Achilleus wondered as he looked on Priam, a godlike man, and the
> rest of them wondered also, and looked at each other. (24.477–84)

At the end of his supplication Priam stresses the uniqueness of his action:

> I have gone through what no other mortal on earth has gone through;
> I put my lips to the hands of the man who has killed my children.
> (24.505–6)

What makes the bridging of this enormous gap possible is the theme of fatherhood. Both at the beginning and towards the end of his speech Priam reminds Achilles of the aged Peleus, and Achilles yields because he sees Peleus in Priam:

> So he spoke, and stirred in the other a passion of grieving
> for his own father. He took the old man's hand and pushed him
> gently away, and the two remembered, as Priam sat huddled
> at the feet of Achilleus and wept close for manslaughtering Hektor
> and Achilleus wept now for his own father, now again
> for Patroklos. The sound of their mourning moved in the house.
> (24.507–12)

From this perception arises the discovery of a shared humanity that transcends the opposition of Achaean and Trojan in which their hostility is rooted. Achilles formulates it in his answer to Priam. This, too, is a kind of reversal since wisdom is a privilege of age, but here a young man, not previously known for his counsel, becomes a spokesman of the final wisdom and expounds it to an old man who is his patient listener:

> There are two urns that stand on the door-sill of Zeus. They are unlike
> for the gifts they bestow: an urn of evils, an urn of blessings.
> If Zeus who delights in thunder mingles these and bestows them
> on man, he shifts, and moves now in evil, again in good fortune.
> But when Zeus bestows from the urn of sorrows, he makes a failure
> of man, and the evil hunger drives him over the shining
> earth, and he wanders respected neither of gods nor mortals. (24.527–33)

The generalisation returns to its point of departure when Achilles

illustrates its truth through the careers of Peleus and Priam, paradigms not so much of mixed blessings, but of great blessings cursed in the end (24.534).

The speech of Achilles posits a human solidarity in the face of divine indifference and persecution, but it does not proclaim a new ethos. It states from the human perspective what the gods habitually assert from theirs: divisions among mortals become irrelevant in the light of the gulf that separates men and gods. The final wisdom of the *Iliad* also remains without effect on future action. In *Paradise Lost*, for instance, the estrangement and reconciliation of Adam and Eve lead to the explicit formulation of a new code of patience and obedience that will govern the conduct of Adam, if not of all his descendants (12.561). From the perspective of such radical change, the reconciliation of Achilles and Priam remains without consequences. None the less, if revaluation seems too strong a term for the last book of the *Iliad*, it is inadequate to see the narrative as merely returning to its beginning, even granting to the characters the gain of a disillusioned knowledge they did not possess at the beginning.

The change introduced in the last book is best seen by pursuing two distinct features of the Priam–Achilles encounter: its secrecy and its emphasis on contemplation. The encounter is not public but occurs in the middle of the night. Achilles remarks at one point that if Agamemnon saw Priam the ransom would be delayed (24.654), and when Hermes appears to the sleeping Priam he makes a similar point to hurry his departure (24.686). But if Homer had wanted to make the ransoming of Hektor a public event he could have done so. There are no narrative constraints that forced the poet into the opposition between a public reconciliation of Agamemnon and Achilles in the open assembly and a private reconciliation of Achilles and Priam under cover of night. Beyond the privacy of the scene there is also the eerie ambience that is created by the intervention of Hermes, who acts not only as the god of wayfarers but also as the conveyor of the dead. Michael Nagler perhaps goes a little far when he interprets the scene as a *katabasis* or journey to the dead and sees in the curiously magnified camp gate the gate to the underworld (p. 184), but the setting of the encounter is unquestionably remote.

Proponents of revaluation can argue that this remoteness is an index of new values. The public and meaningless reconciliation of Achilles and Agamemnon yields to the private and deeply felt reconciliation of Priam and Achilles as father and son. But to locate truth and value on the second term of an outer–inner or public–private opposition seems more in line with novels like *Persuasion* or *Bleak House*, perhaps even plays like the *Philoctetes* or *Oedipus at Colonus*, than with the conventions of Homeric narrative, and it is important to remember that the encounter of Achilles and Priam constitutes only a temporary retreat to the private sphere. As Redfield has written: 'The ceremony of Book Twenty-four takes place

outside the human world because the contradictions it reveals cannot be resolved within the human world' (p. 222). The ceremony does indeed involve reconciliation and something like forgiveness on the ethical level, but it culminates in an aesthetic gesture of mutual contemplation:

> But when they had put aside their desire for eating and drinking,
> Priam, son of Dardanos, gazed upon Achilleus, wondering
> at his size and beauty, for he seemed like an outright vision
> of gods. Achilleus in turn gazed on Dardanian Priam
> and wondered, as he saw his brave looks and listened to him
> talking. (24.628–32)

The final wisdom of the *Iliad* is not the attainment of a new and more human order born out of the destruction of the warrior code, but the temporary and ordered vision of the suffering and contradictions of human life. We are not far from the Ovidian conceit of Orpheus, whose power of song in the underworld made even the wheel of Ixion stand still (*Metamorphoses*, 10.42).

The view of the final book as an aesthetic resolution gains support from the wonderful way in which the poet first introduces Helen:

> she was weaving a great web,
> a red folding robe, and working into it the numerous struggles
> of Trojans, breakers of horses, and bronze-armoured Achaians,
> struggles that they endured for her sake at the hands of the
> war god. (3.125–8)

Powerless to affect the sufferings of which she is the cause, Helen is endowed with an awareness that finds expression in art. Song replaces tapestry in the words with which Helen invites Hektor to stay during his visit to Troy:

> But come now, come in and rest on this chair, my brother,
> since it is on your heart beyond all that the hard work has fallen
> for the sake of dishonoured me and the blind act of Alexandros,
> us two, on whom Zeus set a vile destiny, so that hereafter
> we shall be made into things of song for the men of the
> future. (6.354–8)

But above all it is the conclusion of the first book that supports this view of the last book. I argued above (p. 72) that the resolution of the divine quarrel at the end of Book 1 does not resolve the quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles. Resolution occurs through a shift to the divine associated with music and laughter. I interpreted this shift as a deliberate suspension

to be fully resolved in the reconciliation of Achilles and Priam. That view holds as long as we do not attribute to the poet the belief that his poems have achieved a lasting moral revolution. For the last book also involves a shift analogous to the move from human sorrow to divine laughter. The reconciliation of Priam and Achilles takes place under peculiar circumstances of 'removal'. Achilles and Priam will return to the scene of destruction, and Troy will fall. The *Iliad* remains.