

Ransom for Desire in the Iliad: Hector and Patroclus

Robert Rois

Abstract

The *Iliad* dwells on the wrath felt over an act of transgression. The backdrop for the story is the legend about the abduction of Helen by Paris while a guest at the palace of her husband Menelaos. Violation of the guest-host relationship starts the Trojan War. Yet the *Iliad* itself starts with Achilles' wrath over Agamemnon's taking of the young warrior's companion, Briseis, while the Greeks have Troy under siege. Just as Helen is the disputed object of desire between Menelaos and Paris, Briseis is the disputed object of desire between Achilles and Agamemnon. We can project a fourth element to both love triangles to assess the loss caused by the mimetic rivalry. Hector and Patroclus represent the measure of loss in the two quadrangular relationships. We should ponder over how the quest for appeasement in a war epic results in a peaceful ending.

Keywords: Ate, Briseis, contract law, Hector, Helen, Litai, mimetic double bind, Patroclus, proper consideration

In the plot of the *Iliad*, we see that the Achaeans are fighting Troy for the return of Helen; yet there are contingencies to be resolved. The main theme of the *Iliad* is the wrath of Achilles and all its dire consequences. The abduction of Helen is a backdrop which accounts for the clash of two military factions. The Trojan War rages on for nine years, all because Paris, by abducting Helen, had broken his oath as a guest to his host Menelaos. But then, during the siege of Troy, at the Greek camp a pestilence breaks out. Achilles calls forth an assembly. The seer Kalchas assigns cause for the plague to Agamemnon's taking of the maid Chryseis from her father Chryses, Apollo's priest. To appease the god and prevent the contagious illness from spreading further in the ranks, Agamemnon must give back Chryseis. [1] Agamemnon accedes but takes away Briseis from Achilles. Subsequently, Achilles withdraws from the fighting to sulk in his tent for the loss of Briseis. Absence of the best warrior occasions countless Greek casualties in the furious fighting. The question arises as to how much grief is justified by the loss of Achilles' female companion. We must make Homer's concerns our own.

Patroclus and Hector share much of the spotlight as central characters in the *Iliad*'s plot, for

they are both closely involved in the two love triangles which outline the theme of sacrifice in the Homeric epic. The relationship between Achilles and Agamemnon, with Briseis as object of desire, reflects in microcosm the broader upheaval brought about by the struggle between Menelaus and Paris over the abducted Helen, genesis of the Trojan war. In his *The End of Culture* Eric Gans views the distinction between both conflicts as vital source for the epic genre:

The fact that Achilles' grievance against Agamemnon mirrors within the Greek camp that of Menelaus against Paris with which the Trojan war began is not a mere sign of what a New Critic might call the "well-wroughtness" of the poem, or an illustration of what French formalists call *mise en abyme*. This involution of the external conflict is precisely the moment of literary epic, as opposed to the pre-literary legend from which it sprang. [2]

The critic incisively suggests that Agamemnon's overbearing role vis à vis Achilles narrowly mirrors Paris' violation of the alliance due to his host, Menelaus, while a guest at his palace. The epic springs from the legend. To maintain the role of victors in the struggle, Argives must differentiate themselves from their Trojan foes.[3] There is disorder in their ranks analogous to the war they wage against Troy. Quarrel over two female characters stands as background for the violent devastation of war.

Helen appears most prominently in the Third Book of the *Iliad*. The abducted heroine comes to the fore as Priam, contemplating the fighting from the walls of Troy, inquires about the fighting heroes. The Trojan king reassures Helen of her innocence in the slaughter by blaming the gods for their ordeal [*Il.* III, 164]. [4] Assigning guilt to the gods is an attempt to disclaim responsibility and to discount the possibility of human frailty and the ravages exacted by desire. The inhabitants of Troy understand that Helen's beauty may justify her abduction, but not the war. They wish she would go away on the ships back to Greece, or else she shall become a bane, *pema*, to them and their children [*Il.* III, 156-160]. [5] Hector himself rebukes his brother for taking away from her husband a fair woman of a remote land [*Il.* III, 39, 48-49]. Paris justifies the abduction of Helen by reference to her ravishing beauty, adding that gifts from the goddess of love are not to be cast aside [*Il.* III 65]. Hector's exoneration of Paris shows his allegiance to Aphrodite, protector of Troy.

At this critical juncture in the Third Book of the *Iliad* the two central parties in the conflict arrange for a trial by combat. The winner shall take Helen, bringing a peaceful end to the war and saving lives. But the duel between Menelaus and Paris ends when Helen's lawful husband is left holding Paris' helmet while the legendary womanizer is transported by Aphrodite to the lovely lady's bedchamber. Helen, meanwhile, is still dwelling on her heritage and pointing out the individual prowess of the Greek heroes, standing close to Priam on the Trojan walls. When Aphrodite beckons her to return to the bedroom where Paris is waiting, Helen rebukes the goddess for such sudden summons. On the battlefield

the heroes look for Paris in vain. Understandably, Helen refuses to do “the shameful act,” [νεμεσσητὸν](#) [*Il.* III; 410].[\[6\]](#) We are led to believe that Paris is very different in character from the fighting men. But the goddess remains undaunted and threatens Helen: the goddess shall throw her to the mercy of both Greeks and Trojans, to be torn to pieces by the rage ensuing from their bitter hatred if she does not comply with Aphrodite’s dream play and give in to Paris’ lust. In other words, the goddess of love threatens to make Helen be perceived as the real cause of evil and not visible to Trojan eyes through the beguiling illusion of erotic desire. The cowed Helen complies; and, back in her chamber, Paris, awaiting, again seduces her by using the argument that war has intensified love in his soul and his desire for her is stronger than ever [*Il.* III, 442-446]. In this dream play Paris cheats death through the intensity of erotic desire, personified in the blind Trojan worship of Aphrodite.[\[7\]](#)

Helen appears again in the *Iliad* in Book VI. Hector visits Paris in his chamber and rebukes him for failing to join the others in battle [*Il.* VI, 343-368]. Paris justifies his indolence by insisting he has been grieving in sorrow over the constant slaughter and agrees to rejoin the fighting. In this scene Helen beckons Hector to sit by her and rest from all the warfare taking place “for the sake of shamed me and the blind passion of Alexandros” [*Il.* VI, 356]. She adds that Zeus has set on them a hard fate so that they may be made the subject of song henceforth [*Il.* VI, 358]. Helen and Hector both know the great dimension of the important roles they must play in the heroic epic. The worship of Aphrodite exacts its toll.

In Book VII Helen does not appear herself, but figures prominently in the discussion. There is an assembly held within the walls of Troy. Antenor, an aged counselor, the counterpart of Nestor in the Greek camp, proposes that Helen of Argos be given back to the grieving Achaeans, along with all her possessions, since “we now fight with our sworn words turned into lies” [*Il.* VII, 351-352].[\[8\]](#) Antenor is probably referring to the duel between Menelaus and Paris which was intended as a trial by combat to settle the issue and end the war, but which Aphrodite’s dream play interrupts by whisking away Paris into Helen’s bedchamber. The words of the aged counselor may be taken to refer indirectly also to the original abduction of Helen by Paris while a guest at her husband’s royal court.[\[9\]](#) In either case Paris feels spurned by the argument raised over the object of his erotic desire and refuses outright to give back “his wife,” *gunaika*, although he is willing to give back the treasures he took, adding additional compensation from his store [*Il.* VII, 362-364]. Fairness of the crucial proposal, with the important partial refusal, is not considered by members of the assembly as a parliamentary issue whose justice can be questioned, discussed, and voted on; rather, Priam stands and asks that Paris’ uncontested reply be delivered by a herald to the Greeks, adding a request that a truce be granted for burial of the dead on both sides. “Paris’ decision, for whose sake the war started,” is to be delivered to the fighting Danaans [*Il.* VII, 374].[\[10\]](#) The herald delivers the message, quoting verbatim Priam’s epithet for Paris [*Il.* VII, 388]. The messenger adds a parenthetical embellishment all his own; referring to Paris, he wishes that he should have died before [*Il.* VII, 390].[\[11\]](#) The importance of the

announcement is given legal force since the herald uses in place of Helen's name an epithet, "wedded wife of glorious Menelaus" [*Il.* VII, 392].^[12] The message includes also what is probably a truism; Paris refuses to give back Helen, but the Trojans wish he would. [*Il.* VII, 393]

At the Greek Assembly Diomedes is quick to speak in order to refuse the proposed partial compensation, probably because it excludes the return of Helen, using prominently the lady's name, conspicuously absent from Paris' and the herald's speech [*Il.* VII, 401]. Homer may be pointing out the Trojan guilt implicitly in such obfuscated reference to Helen. Agamemnon echoes the declaimed refusal to accept partial compensation but grants the truce for burial of the slain on both sides.

Guilt for the Achaean-Trojan struggle is attributed to Helen a few times. Hera, cohort of Zeus, tells Athena to inspire courage in the Argives when they are yearning to sail back to Greece; they should stay, fight, and not leave to Priam and to the Trojans Helen of Argos, because "many have lost their lives for her sake" [*Il.* II, 161-162]. Athena goes to Odysseus and delivers the message quoting the same line of verse [*Il.* II, 176-177]. Odysseus brandishes Agamemnon's scepter as sign of authority when addressing noblemen and strikes with it common warriors while reprimanding them for fleeing, despite Hera's request to stay and fight. Helen's rapture is also used as a point of leverage to spur warriors to continue on with the struggle. Nestor, the aged counselor, stirs the troops by urging the men to fight for victory "so each one of the Greeks may lie in bed with the wife of a Trojan to avenge the grief of Helen" [*Il.* II, 354-356]. Adequate retribution appears to be the release of sexual passion. When exposing the catalogue of ships included in the Greek naval force, Homer uses the same line of verse indicating revenge through sexual release to justify Menelaus' resentment in a war for the loss of Helen [*Il.* II, 590]. Abduction engenders a presumed need for further rapture as the wheel of fortune spins uncontrollably.

When appearing in the narrative, the character of Helen is self-conscious about her compromising position. She refers to herself as "shameless me, to whom Agamemnon was once a brother-in-law," when pointing out to Priam the fighting heroes before the dream play in the Third Book [*Il.* III, 180].^[13] Helen's shame is most obvious in the scene where, addressing Hector as her "brother-in-law," she calls herself a despised mischievous bitch [*Il.* VI, 344].^[14] This self-deprecating taunt seems an indirect effort to appeal to Hector's carnal desire. Noble Hector reacts by dashing off rapidly to seek the company of his wife [*Il.* VI, 365-366]. Compared to Helen and Paris, Hector's character is beyond reproach.

The Argives must establish complete differentiation from the Trojans. Eventually, Agamemnon recognizes the need to quell Achilles' anger over the absence of Briseis. Consequently, the Greek chieftain sends an embassy to Achilles. Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix, Achilles' old tutor, try to persuade the sulking hero to accept restitution and return to battle. Restoration to order, as outlined by the fable of the *Litai*, Spirits of Prayer, in

Phoenix's *parainesis* to Achilles during the embassy to his tent in Book IX, offering restitution, requires human acceptance of great physical loss with humility and resignation:

For there are also the spirits of Prayer, the daughters of great Zeus and they are lame of their feet, and wrinkled, and cast their eyes sidelong, who toil on their way left far behind by the spirit of Ruin: but she, Ruin, is strong and sound on her feet, and therefore far outruns all Prayers, and wins into every country to force men astray; and the Prayers follow as healers after her. If a man venerates these daughters of Zeus as they draw near, such a man they bring great advantage, and hear his entreaty; but if a man shall deny them, and stubbornly with a harsh word refuse, they go to Zeus, son of Kronos, in supplication that Ruin may overtake this man, that he be hurt, and punished.

καὶ γάρ τε λιταὶ εἰσι Διὸς κοῦραι μεγάλοιο
χωλαὶ τε ῥυσαί τε παραβλῶπές τ' ὀφθαλμῷ,
αἷ ῥά τε καὶ μετόπισθ' ἄτης ἀλέγουσι κιοῦσαι.
ἦ δ' ἄτη σθεναρὴ τε καὶ ἀρτίπος, οὔνεκα πάσας
πολλὸν ὑπεκπροθέει, φθάνει δέ τε πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἶαν
βλάπτουσ' ἀνθρώπους: αἷ δ' ἐξακέονται ὀπίσω.
ὃς μὲν τ' αἰδέσεται κούρας Διὸς ἄσσον ἰούσας,
τὸν δὲ μέγ' ὤνησαν καὶ τ' ἔκλυον εὐχομένοιο:
ὃς δὲ κ' ἀνήνηται καὶ τε στερεῶς ἀποείπη,
λίσσονται δ' ἄρα ταί γε Δία Κρονίωνα κιοῦσαι
τῷ ἄτην ἄμ' ἔπεσθαι, ἵνα βλαφθεὶς ἀποτίσῃ.
[Il. IX, 502-512][15]

Achilles refuses the restitution offered by the Embassy, displaying excessive, unmitigated bitterness. Eric Voegelin explains the fable of the *Litai* [502], Prayers, daughters of Zeus [508], as the dialectics of guilt, *Ate* [504, 505, 512]:

The Homeric *Ate* means the folly of the heart, the blindness of passion, that makes a man fall into guilt; and it also means the sinful act, the transgression of the law. And the Homeric *Litai* correspondingly means the repentance of the heart, as well as the acts (prayers and sacrifices to god, prayers and offers of recompense to men) in which repentance expresses itself. *Litai* are the daughters of Zeus in so far as they express the active willingness to rise from the fall into disorder, to heal the guilt... Hence if a man repels another man's manifest willingness to repair the broken order, he himself falls into the guilt of perpetrating disorder; the disorder is now his

Ate for which he will have to make full atonement. [16]

Submission to the peaceful entreaty of a suppliant cannot be refused. Suppliants cannot be cast out, nor ignored. Achilles must heed the claim of Agamemnon's embassy. Although the warrior does not accept yet the offered recompense, he keeps Phoenix, his old tutor, by his side [*Il.* IX, 425-429]. The gesture discloses rumination over possibility for self-appeasement by the young warrior.

The legend and the epic must be aligned in our understanding. Paris, the archer who fights from a distance, avoids responsibility for his actions. Achilles, the swordsman, must eventually subdue his wrath and accept that the product of struggle can be reconciliation. Resolution of a conflict comes through sacrifice. How much should a man pay to attain the object of his desire is in question. Gans suggests that resentment "derives from the mimetically induced excess of appetite for the central object." [17] In the *Iliad* retribution comes after the slaying of Patroclus, Achilles' *alter ego*, and at the death of Hector, Priam's son, and Paris' older brother. Both Hector and Patroclus represent the sacrifice suffered due to their involvement in the mimetic double bind drive over appropriation of Helen and Briseis, respectively. [18]

Briseis is a prominent place holder in the *Iliad* accounting for Achilles' wrath and his subsequent withdrawal from the fighting. Her elegiac mourning over Patroclus parallels Helen's mourning over Hector. Patroclus is to Briseis what Hector is to Helen, a kind benefactor. Thus, we may include Patroclus in the love triangle between Agamemnon and Achilles over Briseis, just as Hector enters as a paradigm of loss to be suffered and endured in the struggle of Menelaus and Paris over Helen. Homer possibly intended, in his architectonic conception of the *Iliad*, that the love triangle should be expanded and better viewed as a quadrangular relationship which includes the theme of loss and deadly suffering for the appeasement of desire. The relationships involved in linking Briseis to Patroclus and Helen to Hector are balanced by the paradox of opposites. Briseis, born in the Troad, is highly respected by the Greek Patroclus; while Helen, a Greek, is protected by Hector, a Trojan. This opposing binary structure supports the direct equivalence we ascribe to the importance of two leading women characters, absent from their clan, who subsist among antagonistic factions in the *Iliad*.

The cornerstone speech outlining the quadrangular conception occurs when Briseis mourns the dead Patroclus as the one who would have made her Achilles' legally wedded wife:

Patroclus, far most pleasing to my heart in its sorrows,
I left you here alive when I went away from the shelter,
but now I come back, lord of the people, to find you have fallen.
So evil in my life takes over from evil forever.
The husband on whom my father and honored mother bestowed me

I saw before my city lying torn with the sharp bronze,
and my three brothers, whom a single mother bore with me
and who were close to me, all went on one day to destruction.
And yet you would not let me, when swift Achilles had cut down
my husband, and sacked the city of godlike Mynes, you would not
let me sorrow, but said you would take me back in the ships
to Phthia and formalize my marriage among the Myrmidons.
Therefore, I weep your death without ceasing. You were kind always.

[Πάτροκλέ μοι δειλῆ πλεῖστον κεχαρισμένε θυμῷ](#)
[ζῶν μὲν σε ἔλειπον ἐγὼ κλισίηθεν ἰοῦσα,](#)
[νῦν δέ σε τεθνηῶτα κιχάνομαι ὄρχαμε λαῶν](#)
[ἄψ ἀνιοῦσ'· ὥς μοι δέχεται κακὸν ἐκ κακοῦ αἰεῖ.](#)
[ἄνδρα μὲν ᾧ ἔδοσάν με πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ](#)
[εἶδον πρὸ πτόλιος δεδαϊγμένον ὄξεϊ χαλκῷ,](#)
[τρεις τε κασιγνήτους, τοὺς μοι μία γείνατο μήτηρ,](#)
[κηδείους, οἱ πάντες ὀλέθριον ἦμαρ ἐπέσπον.](#)
[οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδέ μ' ἔασκες, ὅτ' ἄνδρ' ἐμὸν ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεὺς](#)
[ἔκτεινεν, πέρσεν δὲ πόλιν θεῖοιο Μύνητος,](#)
[κλαίειν, ἀλλά μ' ἔφασκες Ἀχιλλῆος θεῖοιο](#)
[κουριδίην ἄλοχον θήσειν, ἄξειν τ' ἐνὶ νηυσὶν](#)
[ἔς Φθίην, δαίσειν δὲ γάμον μετὰ Μυρμιδόνεσσι.](#)
[τῷ σ' ἄμοτον κλαίω τεθνηῶτα μείλιχον αἰεῖ.](#)

[19] [Il. XIX, 287-300]

Patroclus is the kind benefactor who leads Brises to hope for a union in marriage with Achilles. Widowhood makes her a more veridic figure of a wife than Helen. The character of Patroclus shows a kindness which we can identify as exceptional and is ratified by his prominence in the plot. In Book XI Paris shoots and strikes Machaon, the healer, son of the great physician Asclepius [Il. XI, 506]. Achilles observes from a distance a fallen warrior in the battlefield who seems to him to be Machaon and sends Patroclus to verify that the healer has fallen [Il. XI, 610-612]. Nestor had already carried Machaon off in great sorrow, for a healer is one man who is worth many men due to his unique ability to remove arrows and apply medicine [Il. XI, 514-515]. Achilles' closest friend verifies the fact that Machaon has been struck [Il. XI, 650]. Patroclus himself heals Eurypilus [Il. XII, 2; Il. XV, 394]. We should notice that the original intent for Patroclus to leave Achilles' camp and enter the melee is concern over Machaon's absence due to injury in battle. But offering aid to the fallen is not enough for noble Patroclus. The hero, weeping bitterly, returns to Achilles. The great warrior scolds his friend for crying like a little girl [Il. XVI, 7]. At this point in the narrative Patroclus ushers forth a bitter reprimand to Achilles. His parents cannot be Thetis and Peleus, but rather the grey sea and the jagged cliffs must have engendered him [Il. XVI, 33-35]. Then noble Patroclus asks Achilles for his armor and weapons so he can return to

battle in his stead to frighten the Trojans into thinking that he is him [*Il.* XVI, 41].[\[20\]](#) Events leading to Achilles' return to battle originate in the wounding of Machaon, the healer. Patroclus assumes the role of savior.

Achilles considers Patroclus' request seriously. His response outlines in detail the nature of his stance and sets the tone for what follows. In his answer to Patroclus, Achilles expresses resentment because Agamemnon had placed him in the role of a "dishonored outcast" [*Il.* XVI, 59]. The hero had referred to himself by using the same self-deprecating epithet in his answer to Ajax's plea begging him to return to the battlefield during the Embassy from Agamemnon in the Ninth Book [*Il.* IX, 648]. Repetition of the exact same term, [ἀτίμητον μετανάστην](#), [\[21\]](#) reveals how greatly Achilles feels contempt for the role of suppliant, customarily adopted by someone seeking proper redress from a wrong suffered. As he sends Patroclus, wearing his own armor, to take his place in the fighting, Achilles tells his dear friend to come back to his encampment as soon as the Trojans are close to the ships [*Il.* XVI, 95]. His wish is that, at the moment preceding the instant of ultimate disastrous defeat for the Argives, he can claim to be the Greeks' savior along with Patroclus [*Il.* XVI, 100]. Here pride transcends all rationale. Achilles must accept that he cannot reach the glory he craves in life; such is the nature of his prophetic death in youth. He must experience the loss of his *alter ego*, [κεφαλή](#) [*Il.* XVIII, 82], before he can accept the duty of his calling: to perform as the greatest warrior, regardless of reward. [\[22\]](#) In order to attain eternal glory, he must not deny his share in mortality. His friend cannot avoid demise. Patroclus' death at the hands of Hector is the loss Achilles must suffer to realize who he is. Fame in unison with his best friend is a reward in the afterlife. Dying young with glory includes foregoing the pleasures of old age among mortals. Their heroic triumph is not terrestrial.

Hector is another victim who must perish in the story to outline the sacrificial nature of mimetic desire in Homer. The noble warrior is a character who places family matters first. [\[23\]](#) This role prevails when Hector mourns fallen heroes in Book XIII [*Il.* XIII, 769-773]. He reprimands Paris as a womanizer but refrains from going any further. Paris retorts that Hector should not "blame the blameless," [ἀναίτιον αἰτιάσθαι](#) [*Il.* XIII, 775]. The noble warrior acquiesces, yet the subsequent death of Hector constitutes a great tragedy. Mirroring Briseis' lament over Patroclus, Helen starts her litany over Hector's corpse by considering herself the wife of Paris:

Hector, of all my lord's brothers dearest by far to my spirit:
my husband is Alexandros, like an immortal, who brought me
here to Troy; and I should have died before I came with him;
and here now is the twentieth year upon me since I came
from the place where I was, forsaking the land of my fathers. In this time
I have never heard a harsh saying from you, nor an insult.
No, but when another, one of my lord's brothers or sisters, a fair-robed

wife or some brother, would say a harsh word to me in the palace, or my lord's mother - but his father was gentle always, a father indeed - then you would speak and put them off and restrain them. I mourn for you in sorrow of heart and mourn myself also and my ill luck. There was no other in all the wide Troad who was kind to me and my friend; all others shrank when they saw me.

Ἔκτορ ἐμῷ θυμῷ δαέρων πολὺ φίλτατε πάντων,
ἧ μὲν μοι πόσις ἐστὶν Ἀλέξανδρος θεοειδής,
ὅς μ' ἄγαγε Τροίηνδ': ὡς πρὶν ὠφελλον ὀλέσθαι.
ἦδη γὰρ νῦν μοι τόδε εἰκοστὸν ἔτος ἐστὶν
ἐξ οὗ κείθεν ἔβην καὶ ἐμῆς ἀπελήλυθα πάτρης:
ἀλλ' οὐ πω σεῦ ἄκουσα κακὸν ἔπος οὐδ' ἀσύφηλον:
ἀλλ' εἴ τίς με καὶ ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἐνίπτοι
δαέρων ἢ γαλόων ἢ εἰνατέρων εὐπέπλων,
ἦ ἐκυρή, ἐκυρὸς δὲ πατὴρ ὡς ἦπιος αἰεὶ,
ἀλλὰ σὺ τὸν ἐπέεσσι παραιφάμενος κατέρυκες
σῆ τ' ἀγανοφροσύνη καὶ σοῖς ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσι.
τὼ σέ θ' ἄμα κλαίω καὶ ἔμ' ἄμμορον ἀχρυμένη κῆρ:
οὐ γὰρ τίς μοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ
ἦπιος οὐδὲ φίλος, πάντες δέ με πεφρίκασιν.
[Il. XXIV, 762-775] [24]

To justify her legitimate claim to mourn for Hector, Helen calls Paris her husband, πόσις [Il. XXIV, 763]. [25] In describing her life at Troy Paris' siblings become Helen's brothers-in-law, δαέρων [Il. XXIV, 769]. Among them Hector is her kindest benefactor. Helen feels guilt and wishes she had died before coming to Troy [Il. XXIV, 764]. Hector's protection of Helen extends to the treatment he expected her to receive as an equal, among his other relatives. Alliance to the family legitimizes her presence as a companion to Paris at Troy. Helen alludes to a difference between Hecuba and Priam, this difference is most obvious when Hecuba discloses her bitterness over Hector's death. [26] Although Hector reprimands Paris, he welcomes Helen to the family. In her mournful elegiac speech, she expresses intense gratitude for Hector's unique kindness.

Patroclus and Hector fall as victims sacrificed to the mimetic double bind conflict among embittered rivals over Briseis and Helen. The dispossession of Achilles' Briseis, identified as the warrior's prize [Il. I, 185], mirrors the legendary abduction of Helen by Paris while a guest at Menelaus' court, presumed cause for the Trojan war. Upon seizing Briseis, Agamemnon indirectly aligned himself with the enemy, hence justifying Achilles' struggle for differentiation through rightful indignation - even though Briseis herself was obtained by the great warrior upon his slaying of her husband, conforming to the typical acquisition of

spoils in fair battle during persistent warfare in a primitive tribal society. The deaths of Hector and Patroclus fulfill the ransom exacted by the desires of Paris for Helen and Agamemnon for Briseis, respectively. Perhaps the most damning reference to Helen as direct cause for the conflict is the bitter, open lamentation of Achilles when he mourns the death of Patroclus in Book XIX. The hero exclaims that neither the death of his aged father, Peleus, nor that of his son Neoptolemus, not even his own death, in a foreign land “over horrible Helen,” εἵνεκα ῥιγεδανῆς Ἑλένης, could grieve him more than Patroclus’ death [*Il.* XIX, 325]. In the *Iliad* Achilles is destined to suffer punishment for his resentful, and costly, withdrawal from battle by enduring the loss of Patroclus.

The expurgation of Achilles’ anger, *Menis*, is the central theme of the *Iliad*, as Homer tells us by choosing the term as the first word of the poem.[27] The price demanded by fate comes to fruition in Book XVIII of the *Iliad*. Voegelin believes that: “the drama of the *cholos* hinges on the death of Patroclus; with the death of his friend the obsession of Achilles falls apart, and the reality of life and order is restored.”[28] Achilles’ return to the fighting involves recognition that Agamemnon had infuriated him, ἐχόλωσεν [*Il.* XVIII, 111]. Hector must die to avenge the slain Patroclus; and Achilles must fight and face his own death. The great warrior deeply laments the toll exacted by fate due to his refusal to join the melee: loss of his close friend, φίλης κεφαλῆς [*Il.* XVIII, 114]. [29] Voegelin considers the dialogue between Achilles and his mother, the nymph-goddess Thetis, lines [*Il.* XVIII, 78-126] where Homer expounds on the reasons for the hero’s return to the fighting, central to the narrative; the critic calls this passage “the psychological masterpiece of the *Iliad*.” [30] Yet the epic does not end here, despite this climactic peak. Achilles returns to the fighting because Patroclus has died, and the great hero wants to join his friend in the afterlife. He wants Hector dead and is ready to die himself soon, fulfilling the prophecy that rules his destiny as warrior, if Hector pays for Patroclus’ death. Patroclus’ shade tells Achilles that death is near, and both their ashes must be placed in the same urn [*Il.* XXIV, 91-92]. There is a new test for the measure of Achilles’ indignation. His vengeance must reach a true measure, commensurate with the suffering caused by Patroclus’ death. Revenge over Patroclus’ death gains significance when balanced by the loss of Hector, his slayer.

Achilles slays Hector, yet the Trojan leader’s body cannot be disfigured while being dragged around mercilessly by Achilles. The gods prevent decomposition until Priam arrives to ransom the princely corpse of his warrior son. The moment of requital harkens back to the early scene when Briseis is taken. At that moment Achilles is restrained by Athena from drawing his sword against Agamemnon [*Il.* I, 194-195]. Gans reminds us that: “The wrath of Achilles is no mere model of the Greek’s wrath against Troy for the theft of Helen. It is an expression of resentment, not of heroic rivalry, and its effect is to transform the heroic narrative into literature.” [31] Achilles’ refusal to battle Agamemnon is explained: “The necessary choice of ‘wrath’ over violence is an archetypal genesis of resentment.” [32] Thus, the *Iliad* starts with the proposal to dwell on the hero’s anger. Likewise, at the end of the epic, Achilles must subdue his wrath and restrain from striking down Priam when the Trojan

king insists on displaying excessive eagerness to bury Hector's corpse while he is a guest at the hero's tent [*Il.* XXIV, 560-570]. The king must bargain patiently for his son's body, so it can be taken back to Troy for public burial. Achilles grants a grieving father the body of his slain son, which is the hero's battle trophy.[33] Each party has a notion different from what the other is getting, but the transaction is effectuated.

Gans mentions that the *Iliad*, today a work of fiction, was earlier recited at religious festivals as the equivalent of "oral scripture." [34] Voegelin compares composition of the Biblical narrative and the Homeric epic by explaining that the "traditional-historical" method in the former and the "oral composition" of the latter make the architecture and meaning of the works compatible.[35] In the Biblical narrative religious practice includes instructions on how to worship and how to live.[36] The Homeric epic could also express beliefs and customs generally seen in the context of religion and law. Burial of Hector's corpse brings together the will of the gods and the customary respect owed the dead.[37]

Priam and Achilles share an intimate dialogue in which the warrior observes that the condition of mortals is intrinsically much different from the gods' stance as immortals:

Such is the way the gods spun life for unfortunate mortals,
That we live in unhappiness, but the gods themselves have no sorrows.[38]

ὥς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι
ζῶειν ἀχνυμένοις; αὐτοὶ δέ τ' ἀκηδέες εἰσί. [*Il.* XXIV,525-526]

The gods spin the web for human sorrow, while they themselves remain aloof from the bereavement endured by the loss of a loved one. Priam has lost Hector; Achilles has lost Patroclus. Destiny brings the king and the warrior together. The mutual intimacy evoked in the confrontation between Priam and Achilles is crucial. Woeful anguish unites them in lamentation. Priam wants his son's corpse to take to Troy for public mourning; Achilles must turn over Hector's corpse to subdue his anger and put away his thirst for vengeance. Although each party in the agreement gets something different from what the other bargains for, Hector's corpse is ransomed.[39] The Trojan warrior's corpse represents the additional third element in a contractual transaction; besides *offer* and *acceptance*, there must exist just compensation so that both contracting parties can seal a pact.[40] Hector's corpse becomes a metaphor for *proper consideration*; such is a possible early source for an essential element in civilized trade.[41]

We should become aware that the impending death of Achilles, prominent in the legend, is not a tragedy included in the *Iliad*, any more than the actual abduction of Helen is, nor is the fall of Troy. But by drawing a strong quadrangular equivalence between a) Agamemnon's quarrel with Achilles over Briseis, with the resulting loss of Patroclus, and b) the strife of Menelaus against Paris over Helen, with the subsequent death of Hector, the ransom for desire is redeemed by both sides. In this transposition Homer draws back from

the *Iliad* scenario, with Achilles' wrath as central focus, to the cause for the War's inception in the legend due to the abduction of Helen. With the ransom of Hector's corpse, the issue of Achilles' wrath is finally resolved. Hector's sacrifice recalls Patroclus' death. In the bitterly ironic balance of war, Hector had slain Patroclus [*Il.* XVII, 821]. Priam's loss reminds Achilles of the loss his own father, Peleus, must also suffer when his son dies away from home.^[42] Within confines of the epic narrative Homer does not let his choice of topic become either obscure or distant from the legendary themes. Hector and Patroclus as noble victims are not sacrificed in vain to blind desire. Priam and Achilles subdue the desperation engendered by a cruel destiny to wrench from grief a conceptual basis for the endurance of societal commerce. As symbol for *proper consideration* Hector's corpse leaves an indelible mark in the development of commercial trade in Western civilization. The concluding scene of the epic shows the burial of Hector's body, object of a peaceful transaction between sworn enemies. The profound significance establishes relevance for study of the oral epic beyond the realm of literature. At the end of the *Iliad* the frantic nature of heroic struggle merges into the legal framework for contractual exchange.

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Notes

[1] Jaeger explains: “The leitmotiv of *Ate* is heard even in this, the first episode of the poem. Agamemnon is infatuated when he commits the first offense, and in Book IX Achilles is blinded by *Ate*. He ‘knows not how to yield;’ but clings doggedly to his anger and thus exceeds the limit allowed to mortal men.” Jaeger 48.

[2] Culture 243.

[3] René Girard explains that impartiality “sees the roots of justice in differences among men and the demise of justice in the elimination of these differences.” Girard 51.

[4] οὐ τί μοι αἰτή ἐσσί, θεοί νύ μοι αἴτιοί εἰσιν. “You are not guilty to me; the gods now are guilty to me” [*Il.* III, 164]. Trans. mine. Quotes in the original are from the same URL throughout.

[5] Voegelin 96.

[6] The term has erotic reference also when Hera suggests to Zeus that no one should see them engaged in love making, as the god draws the clouds over them [*Il.* XIV, 336]. There occur in the narrative other uses for the term meaning *shameful blame*. In Phoenix’s paraenesis to Achilles during the embassy his aged tutor reminds the hero that there was no *shameful blame* for his anger until now that his fellow warriors beseech him, offering gifts from Agamemnon, to control his wrath [*Il.* IX, 523], which he eventually subdues. Odysseus himself offers consolation to Agamemnon, reminding him that there is no *shame* in offering gifts to make up for past ills even for a king at the time Achilles gets ready to rejoin the fighting [*Il.* XIX, 182]. Lastly, Hermes addresses Priam, after accompanying him through enemy lines on his way to ransom Hector’s corpse; the god leaves the king of Troy to visit Achilles on his own, because it would be *shameful* for a god to be entertained by a mortal [*Il.* XXIV, 463]. The term is used when public blame could be incurred through improper behavior by gods and mortals. In the case of Helen there is no effective avoidance since she

gives in to *shame* when threatened by Aphrodite.

[7] Voegelin considers the narration of the combat between Menelaus and Paris in the Third Book of the *Iliad* “interpenetration of tragedy and comedy” (Voegelin 92). The trial by combat could provide resolution for a struggle which is not meant to end (Voegelin 93). In the confusion caused by the sudden absence of Paris from the battlefield due to Aphrodite’s dream play, a Trojan takes a potshot at Menelaus and the trial by combat truce is broken. [*Il.* IV, 85-222]

[8] [νῦν δ’ ὄρκια πιστὰ/ ψευσάμενοι μαχόμεσθα.](#)

[9] Later in the narrative, there is a Trojan warrior, Hector’s scout, who epitomizes the Trojan vain use of words. When decapitated by Odysseus, Dolon’s head rolls downhill still speaking though separated from his body, a symbolic representation of the Trojan persistent, useless verbiage intended to distract the listener and not resolve the issue of Helen’s unlawful abduction. [*Il.* X, 457]

[10] [μῦθον Ἀλεξάνδροιο, τοῦ εἴνεκα νεῖκος ὄρωρε.](#) [*Il.* VII, 374; *Il.* VII, 388.]

[11] [ὥς πρὶν ὄφελλ’ ἀπολέσθαι](#) [*Il.* VII, 390]. Helen expresses the very same wish applied to herself in her elegiac lament over Hector. [*Il.* XXIV, 764]

[12] [κουριδίην δ’ ἄλοχον Μενελάου κυδαλίμοιο.](#)

[13] [δαῆρ αὐτ’ ἐμὸς ἔσκε κυνώπιδος.](#) In his *Homeric Lexicon* Richard J. Cunliffe considers [κυνώπιδος](#) as an instance of self-deprecation. Cunliffe 242. Herbert W. Smyth in his *Greek Grammar* mentions that we find in Homer iterative imperfect tenses, such as [ἔσκε](#), “denoting a customary or repeated action.” Smyth 146. The adjective [κυνώπιδος](#), “dog-eyed,” employed with the verb “to be” indicates that Helen remains habitually impervious and “lost to all sense of decency.” Cunliffe 242.

[14] [δᾶερ ἐμεῖο κυνὸς κακομηχάνου ὀκρυόεσσης.](#) The term [κακομηχάνου](#) means “contriving evil.” Cunliffe 207. Helen is distasteful to the point of “causing shuddering,” [ὀκρυόεσσης](#). Cunliffe 289.

[15] Lattimore 211. The *Litai* are personified “prayers of repentance, for forgiveness, addressed by an offender to the person injured.” Cunliffe 251. The “perversion or deception of the mind leading to evil doing,” is also personified as guilt, *Ate*, or “Ruin” in Lattimore’s translation. Cunliffe 59.

[16] Voegelin 87-88.

[17] Signs 143.

[18] In his *Violence and the Sacred* René Girard repeatedly defines the *mimetic double bind* as the persistent rivalry among subjects with a similar object of desire. In the typical love triangle, the subjects with a similar goal, but conflicting need, are rivals in the quest for appropriation of the chosen object. Girard 178-182, 186, 188.

[19] Lattimore's *Iliad* 399-400.

[20] Nestor had told Patroclus to ask for Achilles' armor as disguise and to join the fighting leading a troop of Myrmidons to battle in his place, since the young warrior is held back by a prophecy from his mother [*Il.* XI, 793-799]. The aged counselor considers that persuasion by Patroclus, Achilles' older friend, is vital. [*Il.* XI, 786, 790, 792]

[21] Ἀτρείδης ὡς εἴ τινα' ἀτίμητον μετανάστην [*Il.* IX, 648; *Il.* XVI, 59]. The two lines where the unique epithet in question appears are identical in the Homeric text. The term, μετανάστην, is defined as "one who has changed his home, an exile, an outcast." Cunliffe 266.

[22] Voegelin 92.

[23] Considering Hector as defender of the hearth, Jaeger quotes the hero's advice to men from Troy: "One omen is the best: fight for your home" [*Il.* XII, 243]. Jaeger 45.

[24] Lattimore 495.

[25] Helen refers to Menelaus as her former husband, πρότερος πόσις, [*Il.* III 167, 429]. Briseis uses the term ἀνὴρ, to refer to her own husband [*Il.* XIX 291, 295]. This last term includes the sense of being a mature man, not a youth, along with the meaning of husband.

[26] Hecuba tells Priam she wants to gnaw at Achilles' liver when the Trojan king is drawing plans to ransom Hector's corpse. [*Il.* XXIV, 213]

[27] Although *menis* in the first line of the *Iliad* characterizes the wrath of Achilles, the term also applies to the general temper of a people in Hesiod, *Scutum Herculis*, 21. Liddell and Scott 1128. *Menis* is translated often as *ire*. Cunliffe 269. In the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus *menis* refers to the anger of injured parents. *Ag.* 155. Liddell and Scott 1128. *Cholos*, on the other hand, refers to bitter gall, the sense is more deeply psychological. Lidell and Scott 1997. This last term expresses giving in to the effects of anger. Cunliffe 420.

[28] Voegelin 92. The critic explains *cholos* as being analogous to the Latin *inimicitia*, and similar to a Medieval feud. Voegelin 89. Curiously enough, the first mention of *cholos* in the *Iliad* is in reference to Apollo's anger against Agamemnon for dishonoring his priest, Chryses. [*Il.* I, 9]

[29] The remarkable closeness of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus may not be as accessible to a modern reader as it was to Homer's audience. A.W. H. Adkins explains the meaning of the adjective modifying [κεφαλῆς](#), literally, *head*: "It is not surprising that Homeric man should use some word to demarcate the persons and things on which his existence depends and distinguish them from persons and things in general. The word is *philos*, conventionally rendered 'own' or 'dear'; in fact untranslatable, for we are not acutely aware of possessing a limited stock of persons and things upon whom our very existence depends." Adkins 16. Cyrus H. Gordon considers David's mourning over his beloved friend Jonathan in the *Old Testament* [2 Sam. 21-22] like Achilles' sentiment for Patroclus. Gordon 71, 272. Bullinger 438-441.

[30] Voegelin 92.

[31] Culture 244.

[32] Culture 246.

[33] Otto Gierke mentions that in Classical Antiquity there is an "imperative postulate contained in the idea of law which obliges the ruler to utilize the power not for himself but for the community." Gierke 83.

[34] Chronicle 771.

[35] Voegelin 69.

[36] Religious worship and the rule of law is combined prominently in the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20: 2 - 17. Bullinger 100-101.

[37] Early in Book XXIV, Apollo in Olympus pleads that the burial of Hector be allowed using the term *nekus*, corpse,[35]. Zeus tells Thetis to communicate to Achilles the need for the corpse to be ransomed [108]. Achilles also refers to Hector's corpse as *nekus* [423] several times. Addressing Priam, Hermes pairs *uios* [422], son, in apposition to the term, to indicate that the gods care for Hector, although he is a corpse. Achilles orders a tunic to wrap the body for Priam to take back to Troy [581]. The warrior advises Priam to be cautious on his way back, lest someone sees him and tells Agamemnon, for then a delay over the exchange might occur [655]. Homer describes the corpse being taken back on a mule after Hermes' departure [697]. During the actual exchange, Achilles urges Priam to be patient while the bargain goes on, referring to the corpse as "Hector," [561]. He even asks Priam how many days are needed for "Hector's" burial [657]. Priam asks for a twelve-day truce for the ceremony [660], which is granted by Achilles. In his dialogue with Hermes, before meeting Achilles, Priam uses the term *pais*, child, to ask whether his son has been exposed to scavenging dogs [408]. Later Hermes reassures Priam that his ransomed son, [υἶὸν ἐλύσσαο](#), can be taken back to Troy safely [685]. Priam describes the final burial for "him," *autov*

[665, 667], Hector. We notice that Achilles refrains twice from referring to Hector's corpse as a cadaver during final negotiation over the body of Hector in lines 561 and 657, displaying tact to consummate the transaction.

[38] Lattimore 489. The term ἀκηδέεζ [526], is defined by Cunliffe as having the sense "vexed by no cares." Cunliffe 16. The adjective is formed from the negation of the noun κῆδος, meaning "trouble or grief occasioned by a family loss." Cunliffe 226.

[39] Homer covers all aspects of the negotiation leading to the ransom of Hector's corpse. 1) Zeus tells Hera to summon Thetis [Il. XXIV, 65-76]; 2) Hera draws Thetis over to Zeus [XXIV, 88]. 3) Zeus talks to Thetis: Achilles must give back Hector's body for burial [XXIV, 104-119]. 4) Thetis persuades her son to give back Hector's body [XXIV, 128-137]. 5) The hero assents in the same book [139-140]. 6) Zeus sends for Iris; Achilles must spare a suppliant [144-158]. 7) Iris reassures Priam [171-187]. 8) Priam tells Hecuba his intention to approach Achilles [194-199]. 9) His wife warns Priam about the young warrior's wrath [201-216]. 10) Priam tells her he is determined to enter the enemy camp [218-227]. 11) Zeus sends Hermes to protect Priam [334-338]. 12) Hermes addresses Priam [460-467]. 13) Priam confronts Achilles [486-506]. 14) Achilles responds to Priam: "Do not grieve" [517-551]. 15) Priam expresses eagerness to take Hector's corpse [553-558]. 16) Achilles advises Priam to be patient, as a suppliant should [560-570]. 17) Achilles apologizes to Patroclus' shade for giving back Hector's corpse [592-595]. 18) Lastly, Achilles tells Priam to share a meal before going back to Troy. [599-620]

[40] Fuller 8.

[41] There were requirements to be fulfilled to generate an obligation under *stipulatio* in Ancient Law. Principles of the *lex mercatoria* were received into the English Law of Contracts. Lord Mansfield held that "Mercantile law is not the law of a particular country, but the law of all nations." *Luke v. Lyde* (1759). Wikipedia 2023. In modern Anglo American strictly legal usage, we see that "Courts will not ask whether the thing which forms the consideration does in fact benefit the promisee, or a third party, or is of any substantial value to any one ... Consideration means not so much that one party is profiting as that the other abandons some legal right in the present." Fuller 48-49. Priam kisses the hand that slew his son. Achilles puts up in his tent the king of Troy. No contract is drafted, but the pact is sealed.

[42] Priam reminds Achilles of his own father [Il. XXIV, 504]. And Achilles tenderly weeps thinking of Peleus [Il. XXIV, 511]. The lyric candor of this scene can hardly be matched in heroic narrative, for the great warrior weeps, not for his own death, but for the loss his father must subsequently endure.