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Study Material--1
On
The Iliad by Homer
(General Introduction)

For
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❖ Introduction:

The Iliad, a 15,000-line Greek epic poem is the first work of western literature. It is composed at around 7th century BC by Homer (the Greeks believed that the two epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were composed by Homer) in twenty-four books in dactylic hexameter. Both these epics are the earliest literary texts and they represent the combination of century-long oral composition and oral poetry. In the 1920s, the American scholar of epic poetry and the founder of the discipline of oral tradition, Milman Parry established that the style of Homeric poetry was oral. It is traditional and is based on the process of story-telling as it tells the story of an incident that took place during the Greek siege of Ilium (a town in the region of Troy). But this work does not cover the whole **Trojan War**, rather the story covers only a few weeks in the final year i.e. the tenth year of the war. The main theme of the epic is the ‘wrath of Achilles’ originated from his quarrel with king Agamemnon, the Greek leader in the Trojan War. Critics generally believe that there is a strong possibility that book 10 is a later addition. However, the title is derived from Ilion, an alternative name of Troy, which is originated from its legendary founder Ilus. The historical account claims that the Trojan War took place towards the end of the Mycenaean Greece around 1200 BC when the Mycenaean palaces of Greece were destroyed. Homer was looking at these events from a long distance of more than 400 years. So, the probable origin of his epics lies in the Mycenaean age.

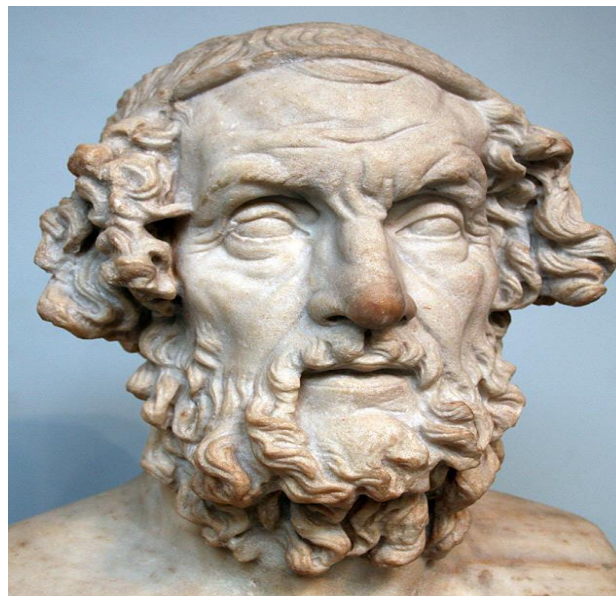
❖ About the Author:

Homer is regarded in antiquity as the author of two earliest epic poems—*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Some other works like—*Margites* and *Batrachomyomachia*—were also attributed to him but later this claim was rejected. Actually, little is known about his life. Even the Greeks did not know anything evidently about Homer. There are many views about Homer and the author(s) of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

- i. According to the account provided by Herodotus, Homer was living in 850 BC but the Modern scholars dated the *Iliad* to 750 BC and the *Odyssey* to 725 BC. The modern scholars’ view depended on the time of the Trojan War and its aftermath. And they described that these two epics were composed long after the events of the Trojan War.

- ii. The ancient Greeks assumed that Homer was a blind minstrel who had to suffer a lot because of poverty and his eventual death came as a result of that suffering and hardship in that wandering life. He was buried on the Aegean island of Ios.
- iii. The ‘separatists’, some Hellenistic scholars, claimed that the authors of the Iliad and the Odyssey were not same. Even some eighteenth-century scholars, known as the ‘analysts’ showed their doubt about the single author of these two epics.

However, the oral tradition found in these two epics showed some ray of hope in finding the solution to the problem of authorship. Looking at the nature of oral poetry most of the scholars demanded that these two were written by a single author, though the doubt still remained. The mixed dialect of the epics suggests that they were written in the east Aegean. And many scholars also claimed that Homer lived in that area and Smyrna and Chios were the probable cities. In fact, the mixed language does refer to many places, not a single one.



Marble terminal portrait bust of Homer,
made by the Romans probably in the 2nd century

A collection of thirty-three Greek hexameter poems in epic style, known as **Homeric Hymns**, were composed in between 8th and 6th century BC. The main theme of these poems was the address to gods and minor deities. The scholars of antiquity assumed that Homer was the author as in the 3rd Hymn the author described himself as “a blind man living in rocky Chios” (*Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, P 304). But the Alexandrian scholars refused Homeric authorship. But nobody knows when were these poems put together.

❖ Epic Poetry:

In the ancient times epic poetry was called “verse in hexameters” and “this included the didactic poetry of Hesoid and the bucolic poems of Theocritus” (*O.C.C.L.* P. 231) as these were metrical in style. The Greek and Latin epics were hexameter narrative poems of magnificent measures where the heroic endeavours of the heroes were celebrated. Homer set up the models in his epics as the heroes came from the mythical world and they were extraordinarily courageous and valorous. The source of the contents of the epics were history, myths, legends and even the folk-tales. The gods and goddesses participate in the events of the epics actively and the stories are normally set in the heroic past of the country. The other important features are—the omniscient narrator, invocations, lengthy speeches, extravagant greetings, detailed similes, digressions and so on and all these help in the presentation of a physical world full of battles decorated with arms and ships and cloths.

Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were the earliest examples of Greek epics whose origins were lost but it is assumed that they were originated in the Mycenaean era. The epic was introduced in Rome probably in the 3rd century BC with the Latin version of Homer’s *Odyssey* by Livius Andronicus.

❖ Oral Poetry:

Oral poetry has historical significance in literature. It’s a type of poetry where writing is not the medium and it was popular in narrative form on the pre-literate societies. According to the popular belief Homer’s epic poems were oral in the original compositions. The classical scholars demanded that these two Western epics were written poetry but Milman Parry

❖ Trojan War:

The Trojan War and its aftermath were the subjects of many Greek legendary works. Troy was an ancient city on the Asian side of the Hellespont. Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, was the wife of Menelaus, the king of Sparta in Greece. Paris, a prince of Troy, handsome son of king Priam and brother of Hector, once visited Sparta and breaking all the rules of hospitality abducted Helen (though according to some other sources Helen eloped with Paris) as once Paris selected Aphrodite as the winner of the golden apple and was granted the most beautiful woman in the world as his reward. He took Helen to Troy though Hector, the greatest fighter of Troy was not happy with this. Here Menelaus appealed to his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae or Argos, son of Atreus and husband of Clytemnestra. These

two brothers with the accompaniment of other great Greek fighters like Achilles, Odysseus and others raised an expedition to regain Helen. Other fighters joined them because Helen's father Tyndareus made all her suitors take an oath that they would protect the rights of the bridegroom. So, the Achaeans laid siege to Ilium but at the end of nine years they did not succeed. Homer in his *Iliad* recounted the events after that nine years of war. Finally, Troy was destroyed by the Achaeans.

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(I have attached one pdf file containing an essay on the general introduction to Homer's *Iliad* that will help you for your further understanding of the text.)

Introduction: Homer; Analysis and Influence

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Introduction: Homer; Analysis and Influence

After 2700 years on the best seller list, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in English translation are still required reading in most college/university basic world literature courses, judging from their inclusion in most introductory world literature texts (The Norton Anthology, The Longman Anthology, The Bedford Anthology). Interest in Homer in the 21st century seems to be stronger than ever. The most recent of the over two dozen translations of Homer's *Iliad* and/or *Odyssey* in the last 50 years has just been published (*The Iliad*, trans. Herbert Jordan, University of Oklahoma Press). Since 1990 there have been eight new English translations of the *Odyssey* and six of the *Iliad* (see Bibliography, II. English Translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*). New critical studies on Homer since 2000 seem to be on the rise (see Bibliography, I. A Selected List of Critical Works on Homer's Epics Since 2000). A renewed interest by historians and critics questioning the authenticity of the Trojan War and Troy has generated a number of new books (Bryce, 2006, Burgess 2001, Castledon 2006, Latacz 2001, Lowenstam 2008, Strauss 2006, thomas and Conant 2005, and Thompson 2004), which have appeared in the last few years (see Bibliography, I. A Selected List of Critical Works on Homer's Epics Since 2000). Even the graphic novel has appropriated Homer in the projected seven volume series of Eric Shanower, of which three volumes (27 installments; see Works Cited) have already been published.

In her recent book, *The Return of Ulysses; A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey* (2008), Edith Hall revisits the influences of Homer's epic on Western culture first approached by W. B. Stanford in his classic *The Ulysses Theme* (1954) and finds that Homer's influence has pervaded all phases of contemporary culture. This is especially evident in film. Of the several versions of Homer's epics brought to the screen since the silent era (see Hanna R. Roisman's essay in this collection), almost half have been produced in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (*Troy*, 2004, *Helen of Troy* (TV mini series), 2003, *The Odyssey* (TV mini series), 1997, *Helen of Troy*, 1955, *Ulysses*, 1954). In addition to the film adaptations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* mentioned above, critics have also turned to both classic and contemporary world cinema for Homeric influences, especially in the American Western film (see for example Blundell and Ormand [1997], Eckstein and Lehman [2004], Myrsiades [2007], and Winkler [1985, 1996]). Works of fiction and non fiction influenced by both of Homer's epics have also been at a record high (see

Bibliography, III. A Selected List of Works of Fiction Since 2000 Influenced by Homer's Epics).

In order to focus on this resurgence of Homeric interest in popular culture, *College Literature* several years ago invited a number of scholars to contribute articles for possible inclusion in a special issue on "Reading Homer in the 21st Century" (34.2 Spring, 2007). The response and quality of the manuscripts received were of such high quality that one issue was not enough for the essays accepted for publication. Thus only a year later after our first special issue on Homer, we are happy to offer our second installment on the analysis and influence of the *Iliad*, and *Odyssey*.

The first four of the eight essays in this present collection analyze episodes from the two Homeric epics. The first essay by Rick M. Newton, "Assembly and Hospitality in the *Cyclopeia*" focuses on Odysseus' account of his adventure with the Cyclops in *Odyssey* 9 through which Professor Newton argues how that adventure illustrates two important type scenes found in the *Odyssey*—those of violated hospitality and the Homeric assembly. Pauline Nugent in "The Sounds of Sirens; *Odyssey* 12.184-91" continues with an analysis of the *Odyssey* focusing on Odysseus' adventure with the Sirens in *Odyssey* 12 and the appeal of their song "to transcend the earthly and lift the human spirit to a higher plane." Nathaniel Wallace in, "Cultural Process in the *Iliad* 18.478-6, 19.373-80 ("Shield of Achilles") and Exodus 25:1-40:38 ("Art of the Covenant")" turns his attention to the *Iliad*, first to the passage on the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 and 19 and secondly to the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament's Book of *Exodus* to discuss the notion of community as it is revealed in these two fundamental episodes. In "Aias and the Gods" William Duffy concerns himself with the Greater Aias' complicated relationship with the gods in the *Iliad*, emphasizing that Zeus and Athena's ill treatment of this hero reflect their own feelings about the nature of the Trojan War.

In the final four essays of the present collection, we turn our attention to Homer's influences leading off with Joseph Roisman's "Greek Perspectives on the Justness and Merits of the Trojan War." Roisman poses the question of how writers following Homer viewed the causes and merits of the Trojan War by presenting the perspectives of historians Herodotus and Thucydides, the tragedians Aeschylus and Euripides, essayist Isocrates, and those of the Spartan king Agesilaus and Alexander the Great. In "Pouring the Wrong Wax in the Literary Mold: Plutarch's *Marius* and Homer's *Odyssey*," Michael Nerdahl shows how Plutarch creates a connection between his *Life of Marius* and the *Odyssey* to illustrate the negative qualities of Marius when set against the qualities that aid Odysseus throughout his journey. Hanna M. Roisman in "Helen and the Power of Erotic Love: From Homeric Contemplation to

Hollywood Fantasy,” looks at the treatment of Helen in the Benioff-Petersen 2004 film, *Troy* and discovers that although both the film and Homer’s *Iliad* emphasize the all-powerful emotion of erotic love, the two treatments of Helen differ in that the *Iliad* offers a contemplation of the nature of that love, whereas *Troy* offers merely a fantasy of it. In the final essay by Jessica Wolfe, “Chapman’s Ironic Homer,” the author turns to the first complete English translations of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and explores the various motives behind Chapman’s eagerness to identify the “ironic” and “scoptic” qualities found in both poems.

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