HOMER'S ASYMMETRICAL GODS

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HOMER'S ASYMMETRICAL GODS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reading Homer's critics, one surmises that almost every theory that has been promoted in regard to Homer's use of the gods in the Iliad is credible; every critical commentary concerning Homer's gods does make sense. For instance, it is true to say that Homer's gods are artistic tools in the hands of the poet--tools to save the action of the poem, 1 to keep it going by having the gods intervene, on sometimes unlikely occasions, in the actions of men. Too, it is believable to say that the gods are projections of man's feelings; sometimes Aphrodite is personified love, 2 Ares, personified hate. 3 Credible is the conception of Homer's gods as being fellow sufferers with man, 4 for they do, at times, weep with man, and occasionally in the course of their intervention into the war, the gods suffer physical woundings. On the other hand, to


4 Ibid., p. 244.
view the gods as the comedians of the *Iliad* is to see an aspect of the gods intrinsic in the conflict of the poem; certainly the gods engage in domestic skirmishes that are both fatuous and hilarious. To see the gods as capricious is tenable, for the gods carry out their own intrigues with each other at the expense of man, the reader being fully aware that the gods cannot lose to the extent that man can—man risks his life in the *Iliad*; the gods simply cannot. In other words, what is tragedy to men is sometimes sport to the gods. Also evident in Homer's depiction of the gods is his use of them to point the moral issues of the *Iliad* precisely in reference to Achilles' revolt against Agamemnon.

With the preceding allusions to the differing conceptions concerning Homer's understanding of the gods in the *Iliad*, one sees, indeed, just how multifarious the conceptions of Homer's understanding of providence really are. Even though each critic would insist on the superior value of his own frame of reference for understanding Homer's own view, one need only yield each critic or commentator his perspective, his presuppositions, to perceive the honesty in each generalization about Homer's gods. However, when there do exist several opposing generalizations, all with

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6 Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition*, p. 142.

claims on veritableness, there is a sense, however slight, in which all the specific generalizations are false. They are false to the extent that they are partial; they lack wholeness, or inclusiveness. Therefore, if one were possible, a whole view or an inclusive view would be desirable for readers of the Iliad.

Because all of the above theses are at least partially true, a whole theory would not necessarily displace them, but would simply admit them to their proper places while at the same time putting them in appropriate relationships to a single inclusive generalization capable of informing all the varying theses at once. Toward such a task is the direction of this study.

However, before presenting an outline indicating the formulae of such an informing generalization, there are one or two preliminary matters that now need mentioning. First, there has been some observation that the characters in the Iliad, gods as well as men, are all subject to fate—or destiny. Any treatment of Homer's use of the gods should include a discussion of what Homer meant by fate. Here, then, is a preliminary perusal of Homer's definition of fate, as one can delineate it from the poem. Homer's usual word for fate is aisa, used, of course, in its appropriate grammatical forms. (Homer frequently uses the word moros to mean fate also.) Cedric Whitman, speaking of the gods' subjection to fate, said,
The superiority of the gods lies in the absoluteness of their being, which, since it is free of time, immortalizes the processes and actions of the world, and necessitates their final results before they take place. This is the "fate" to which the gods are bound; Zeus himself represents it more broadly than the others, whose functions are conceived in connection with a single character's efforts, or with the circumstances and events of a limited time or place.

Zeus' arbitrariness and his subservience to "fate," with their apparent contradictions, are actually mere appearances, modes of speaking. The "fate" which he must acknowledge is the poet's scenario viewed as ineluctable fact, and herein lies the real meaning of the frequent phrases, "according to fate" and "contrary to fate." If fate here implied anything like predestination, the suggestion that anything could happen contrary to it would be meaningless. But nothing of the sort is implied. When Homer says, "Then such-and-such would have happened contrary to fate, had not--" he says in fact little more than that it almost happened, but did not. The added meaning which one senses in the phrase is simply a reflection of the view of the gods, who know the end, poignantly juxtaposed to the effort of the mortals who do not. And this repeated reminder of the gods' timeless comprehension of human action casts a mysterious light of inevitability upon all that happens in the Iliad. 8

In Whitman's sentences lie the typical views of the meaning of fate in the Iliad, namely, that the characters of the poem are subject to the poet's knowledge of what must, or at least will, happen, and in the gods is embodied the omniscience of the poet. And certainly it is evident, when Zeus thinks of saving Hektor from death and Athene chides him with the words,

8 Whitman, Homer and the Heroic Tradition, pp. 227-228.
"Do you wish to bring back a man who is mortal, one long since doomed by his destiny, from ill-sounding death and release him? Do it, then; but not all the rest of us gods shall approve you."

(XXII, 179-181)

that Homer is indicating that even though the gods at times think of altering the course of things, they do not. Since they never do alter the course of things, whether or not they could becomes a moot question.

To accept the understanding of fate as promoted by Whitman is virtually to miss the most important aspect of Homer's understanding of it. When Homer speaks of fate or destiny (aisa and moros), it almost always has particular reference to man's mortality. In the first book of the Iliad Thetis says to her son Achilles,

Ah me, my child. Your birth was bitterness. Why did I raise you? If only you could sit by your ships untroubled, not weeping, since indeed your lifetime is to be short, of no length. Now it has befallen that your life must be brief and bitter beyond all men's. To a bad destiny I bore you in my chambers.

(I, 413-418)

The context of the lines clearly indicates that destiny means man's mortality. Thetis sorrows that her mortal son must die. The lines from Book XXII, quoted above, also show Homer's use of destiny to mean man's death—in that case, Hektor's. Also, the instances of

9 Homer, The Iliad of Homer, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1951), p. 440. All further references to the Iliad, unless otherwise noted, will be from this translation and will be designated by book number and line number immediately following each quotation.
individual warriors' dying in battle is described as fate's overtaking them. Fate, death, mortality—all connote the same idea. Therefore, what is fated, what cannot be altered, is not what happens when man is living (although Homer and his characters succumb to a poetic inevitability without which the plausibility of the poem would have suffered), but simply the very real fact that man must and indeed does die. The gods are subject to fate, to destiny, in that though they themselves do not die, they cannot do anything about man's mortality.

One can see how very convenient it is for the poet to have the gods subject to something at the point of man's death, since it has always been obvious to every man that someday he, too, must die. If Homer had given the gods any real option in respect to the men's deaths, some of his readers would conclude that the gods could have been nothing but villainous had they not saved the men from this ultimate undoing. Thus, destiny or fate is Homer's attempt to "justify the ways of god to man," at the specific point of man's inevitable mortality. Whether or not he was successful in this justification really does not matter. That he tried means that he, like most poets, faced the implications of his own death in the best way he knew how, which after all is what every man does after some fashion—penultimately—since ultimately the poet, too, does die.

As has been suggested, the gods play a significant role in the actions of men outside the above particular delineation of fate. Zeus'
promise to Thetis to allow the Trojans a winning hand in the war until Achilles' return to the fight serves as a hub of movement around which the gods always manipulate the action of the war. For instance, gods who are pro-Greek influence the war in favor of the Achaians, but Zeus' promise stays the battle from any final victory, even when it seems logical from a military standpoint that the war should be near its end.

As long as it is not death's time for man the gods have a freer hand. For example, Aphrodite speeds away with Paris saving him from Menelaus when Paris and Menelaus had been fighting in order to decide the outcome of the entire conflict; had it been time for Paris' destiny to have been accomplished, one knows that Aphrodite could not have spirited Paris away to safety. On the contrary, her choice would have consisted of either staying out of the way or of aiding Menelaus through a deception of Paris--or perhaps she would have aided him in some other equally effective way. Where Homer had a choice, the gods had a choice. Another instance of this was at the time of Hektor's death when Apollo abandoned his watch over Hektor, and Athene went to Hektor to deceive him in the form of his brother Dephobos. The gods have a part in man's fate, but they cannot, any more than Homer, alter the fact of man's mortality.

Another example of how particular events are subject to the movement of fate is the rather fantastic story of Diomedes' wounding of Aineias. Homer was certainly exercising his poetic license in relating the whole episode surrounding Diomedes' feats in Book V. Diomedes is caused to
kill some important opponents, wound both Aphrodite and Ares, and severely wound Aineias. Aineias' surviving his wounds was dependent on the help he received from the gods and on the overriding circumstance that his destiny was not to be fulfilled at that time. In other words, the gods had unusual power at that point to heal Aineias simply because the gods were not bound by the demands of Aineias' fate. Otherwise, so serious a wound as a broken hip socket and broken skin at the bone break would have certainly destroyed Aineias. A modern author could have saved Aineias only by a miracle of surgery performed in the most sanitary operating room. Homer's, and thus his gods', limitations in such a situation were determined by the particular man's fate (in this case, Aineias'); it was not time for Aineias' mortality to be realized.

The second matter that needs mentioning before proceeding to outline the major thrust of this paper is the basic nature and method of this study, particularly as they both relate to the Homeric Greek text. This study will follow the rules inherent in interpreting Homer based primarily on one specific English translation of the Iliad--Richmond Lattimore's. After a perusal and cursory comparison of the translations of George Chapman, Alexander Pope, W. H. D. Rouse, I. A. Richards, Robert Graves, Richmond Lattimore, and Leaf, Lang and Myers, it was decided that it would be best to rely upon one translation. Charles Beye called Lattimore's work an important poetic translation, saying that Lattimore rendered a very faithful, almost line for line, translation
of the *Iliad*. Although Lattimore's translation fails to be properly exalted at descriptive points of the poem, it is true to the Greek and not pretentious. Thus Lattimore's translation is a logical one to use; a translation true to the Greek seems appropriate to one's determining the meaning and use of Homer's gods in the poem. Nevertheless, that the whole study would be strengthened by one's having read the poem in Greek could verily be argued; it is very evident, when one surveys the formal criticism of Homer, how much the increased understanding of the formal and purely stylistic aspects of Homer's art contribute to a proper awareness of his total impact. All Homeric scholars agree as to how ineffective every translation of the *Iliad* has been. Revealing the difficulty of an adequate translation, John Scott remarked,

> Many phrases which cannot be brought into English without becoming the flattest prose or the worst metrical drivel are expressed in the original by words of melody and of majesty, e. g. Homer refers to kine as "eilipodas helikas bous," a peculiarly charming group of sounds, yet the English thereof "cattle with crumpled horns and shambling gait" is common prose which cannot be turned into melodious English by any genius of poetry.

However, having admitted to the efficacy of one's being privy to the *Iliad* directly through the Greek, one doubts that in the face of so many translations, of which the above named are but a few, such a reading of

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the Greek text for this study could do little more than add credence to what is to be said. In particular, it would comfort only those readers who like to hang their hats of belief on such flimsy hangers as one's ability to perform mental calisthenics rather than one's ability to become qualitatively involved in Homer's \textit{Iliad}. Particular word studies or textual problems relating to the subject of Homer's use of the gods will be examined lexically when, if, and where needed. This statement of method must suffice for the time being. Though it would be advantageous to have read the \textit{Iliad} in the Greek in order to have captured the poetic fulness of the work necessarily denied to pedestrian English readers, it would be far worse to refuse involvement in so monumental a work simply because of the risk that is present due to a language limitation. No one who translates or interprets Homer does so without risks, as Matthew Arnold was able to point out about translator Newman, but to avoid interpretation because of the risks involved would be analogous to avoiding decision-making on any level simply because one cannot foresee the future or comprehend the whole. That would even be un-Homeric.

The objective of this paper is not to be right about Homer's understanding and use of the gods in some absolute sense, but to enter the spiraling Homeric conversation as a lesser voice---to be right, given the paper's presuppositions and limitations. Also, if this study contributes anything at all, even a fresh look, to the conversation
surrounding Homer's use of his gods, the merit of the paper shall reach beyond its author's fondest hopes. The Iliad, like Homeric studies, had its minor characters, its Axyluses and Megeses; no mammoth literary piece is without them. This study is an echo of the voice of an Axylus, but this does not make it less real; hopefully, it does not make it completely irrelevant. Thus, this is a study of Homer's use of the gods in the Iliad based on the English translation by Richmond Lattimore with special attention to the Greek text at those places that are particularly pertinent to this study. If one can believe Gilbert Highet, in his discussion on teaching the classics, a partially subjective approach to the study of Homer is definitely desirable.

When one notes that Homer's critics have postulated several ideas concerning his view toward his gods, one automatically wonders why there has been so much divergence of criticism. One fairly satisfactory reason that suggests itself is that Western thinkers historically have tried to simplify nearly all observable phenomena, including works of art. To systematize through classification of data is a product of not only a scientific age but also is a product of the earlier demands of reason, of philosophy and logic. There need be no dispute concerning the helpfulness of systematizing, of condensing, of simplifying any object of study. It may be true that one perceives the macrocosm more clearly when he has

truly seen the microcosm. If one can determine the role of the gods in Homer's *Iliad*, for instance, it follows that one's understanding of Homer's men, or possibly Homer's view of morality and a hundred other things, may also become more lucid. However, contrary to the real value of classification is the greater risk inherent in systematizing, particularly in regard to Homer. That is, one may interpret the individual matter too narrowly; he may take a provincial or parochial stance that is eventually suffocating, destructive, or limiting to an appropriate explication of the whole. In dealing with the *Iliad*, therefore, proper caution in this regard is of first importance.

Notwithstanding all the mystery surrounding Homer (who he was, where he came from and where he performed, when he lived, and whether he was one or many), it is now beyond dispute that Homer was a pre-philosophical man. What this means is that he lived before the development of formal philosophy and consequently cannot be expected to have been interested in systematizing his views on the world, life, or god. He simply took what he had and worked from there; there were no institutional demands on Homer as post-philosophical and post-scientific writers have known. There were not even poetic restrictions, in the same context that a literary criticism, formal or informal, has produced them, put on Homer. About the closest things to an institutional type of thinking in the *Iliad* are the proverbs one finds there; however, the proverbs are themselves variegated in content and viewpoint. The
closest thing to a formal restriction on Homer was probably the question of whether his poem pleased his listeners, whether they were entertained, and he probably gleaned this information from the faces and attitudes of his audience. Therefore, any attempt to make a final interpretation of Homer’s theological viewpoint, to make an interpretation to end interpretation, appears at once fallacious. One sees that consistency of formal thought was not one of Homer’s concerns, at least in the same manner that consistency is maintained and judged by today’s artists and standards. Consequently, one must consider Homer’s own historical place as axiomatic to understanding him when one begins to interpret the Iliad.

Naturally, one would hope that Homer’s presentation of the gods in the Iliad was mainly due to his genius, meaning his own poetic ability, rather than to an accident of birth alone. Whether what he did with the gods was out of a consciousness or not, the presence of all the implicit and explicit ramifications of the gods in the epic poem speaks of genius rather than accident. The presence of those ramifications helps explain why the poem survived not only the ravages of centuries of the process of letters (transcription, editing, translating and natural linguistic evolution), but also the ravages of man’s fickle interest and imagination. Also, the magnificence of the poem is reflected by the multifarious views in the poem. It was Homer’s strength, surely unequaled during his time, and some argue that it has never been equaled, that while he
maintained a reasonably tight dramatic unity in the *Iliad*, he also created a unique multiple view of reality. How Homer managed this creative task is somewhat due to his historical place, his pre-philosophical attitude that has been described above. In the answer to the question of what Homer's pre-philosophical place means to interpreting his poem lies the basis for a criticism of his understanding of the gods.

Pre-philosophical Homer looked at life with all the materials and tools at his hands, and, without rejecting any of what he personally had distaste for, he described what he saw in the form of the epic. The materials were chiefly the mythopoeic tradition including both men and gods, the actual history or saga of the Trojan conflict and its geography, and the way Homer's contemporaries lived and acted with each other. The latter factor was the controlling axis for Homer's poem, but altogether they showed to Homer that the primary consideration of life is that it is complicated. Homer undoubtedly had the choice of whether or not to develop a complicated or a simple view of life. He chose the complicated view, meaning the many-sided view, and although he included simple views, traditionally poetic and traditionally conventional or proverbial views, within his poem, he saw that man's life was multifarious in feeling rather than simple, and he was true to the complexity throughout the *Iliad*.

One cannot read Homer's critics without finding that no matter what differing viewpoints they have concerning Homer's gods, they...
generally agree that the motivation for the Iliad is mainly human. That is, the critics agree with the statements above that Homer's understanding of man's life, his own particular perception of humanity, permeates the whole of the Iliad. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that every aspect of Homer's view of the gods is informed by his perception of life, human life. And if it is true that many differing and sensible conceptions of Homer's gods have been expounded, it would follow that one can see in Homer's many uses of the gods a reflection of his view that man's life is complicated. One might surmise from this that the polytheistic view is especially conducive to a presentation of the conception of life as being complicated. Homer's gods, indeed, are complicated beings, both in themselves and in their relationships with men and each other. Their choices, even Zeus', are limited by each other, and, as has already been alluded to, by the fact of the brevity of man's life. The gods' lives were on the line much the same as the men's; the mere fact of immortality, to which the gods were privy, in no way released them from the onus of decision in regard to whether or not they would be involved in men's lives. Therefore, although on the surface of the plot of the Iliad, Homer, like all tragic poets, was working with the problem of the brevity of man's life, implicitly anyway, he was struggling with the question of whether there is within life some qualitative difference which separates the living from the living dead. That question belongs both to the conflict surrounding Achilles and to the conflict surrounding the gods. If the gods
are frivolous it may not be their immortality that makes them so, but rather Homer's working out of the view that there is really something frivolous about life itself, especially at the points where man's seriousness becomes too large for itself, when seriousness overruns into self-pity as both Achilles and Agamemnon pity themselves in the course of the Iliad, and in so doing, appear as ridiculous and unheroic as modern soap-opera heroes. The frivolousness of the gods offers a relief in the poem when man's life tends to get blown out of proportion to itself.

Therefore, when one interprets particular questions raised by the Iliad, such as the questions of the gods, one must remember the idea that what informs every aspect of Homer's poem is his understanding of man's life. He had much to work with in terms of what he saw there (his tradition, the saga, and his contemporary world) and in terms of what he felt here (his own subjectivity). His strength was principally his refusal to adopt any theoretical system, any provincial or parochial view that might have classified his thought in some predictable mold. To the extent that poets adopt a provincial view, to that extent, art is lost. Homer completely escaped any loss of balance and magnificence that John Milton fell prey to as a result of his adherence to Puritan idealism. One feels that Homer took what was objective and subjective, welding them together in a way that has never been fully mimicked since. He stuck to that welding without regard to ideological
contradiction. It was not his goal to put everything he knew into a crucible with hopes of melting his knowledge into some alchemical purity. Even though attempts are still made to arrive at some simple view of Homer's thought, it seems most probable that Homer, himself, set a task for the Iliad contradictory to any purely simple view.

Thus far, it has been the purpose of this paper to summarize the principal critical views concerning Homer's use of the gods in the Iliad, to mention the overriding theme of man's mortality that influences the entire poem, to acknowledge and to defend the limitations imposed on this work by its author's language deficiency, and to briefly outline the specific contribution that this paper intends for the criticism of Homer's understanding of providence in the Iliad. The last item takes as its touchstone the idea of Homer's complex view of existence implicit in every major critic's belief that the motivation for the Iliad is mainly human. It remains for the paper to examine in particular the major views of Homer's critics in regard to his understanding of the gods, to explicate the Iliad at points pertinent to this study, and to broaden the ideas and their problems suggested in the outline of what has been called "an informing generalization concerning the varying interpretations of the gods in Homer."
CHAPTER II

HOMER'S GODS--THE MULTIPLE VIEWS OF THE CRITICS

Any comprehensive discussion of the various commentaries on Homer's understanding of the gods in the *Iliad* would include more than what can be properly termed exegetical criticism of the poem. For instance, a fully comprehensive discussion would include giving attention to what has been said about the gods from the very exclusive standpoints of archaeological discovery or cultural anthropology or sociology or mythography. To include every such investigation lies outside the scope and purposes of this study. In the first place, most disciplines which try to establish ideas of the Greek gods use Homer as a reference, one among many, to aid in documenting each discipline's specific conception of Greek religion. What this often looks like is a too narrow interpretation of Homer, for each discipline uses him chiefly at those points where he agrees with their findings. The statement by Cedric Whitman that "the epics present the gods confined in poetic contexts, so that, apart from a few references to cults, we can know little about the official or popular religion,"\(^1\) supports the idea that Homer's

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presentation of the gods is largely adaptation, not adoption. Consequently, this study will adhere to commentaries which, hopefully, are primarily interested in gleaning an understanding of Homer's gods through exegesis of the poem; the strength of this approach to Homer lies in the exegete's perceiving Homer as a creative artist whose presentation of the gods is largely the poet's own and seeing the presence of cultural-religious or historical phenomena in the Iliad as incidental to what Homer, himself, does with the gods. Many of the interpreters described in this study work out of and use the findings of the mentioned disciplines as presuppositions for their interpretations (Cedric Whitman's exposition itself is rooted in work done by students of Greek religion, and Robert Graves is, himself, a fine mythographer), but their central theses derive mainly from direct explications of the Iliad. Therefore, the work of this paper will concentrate on a few representative explications; related disciplinary explications of the Homeric gods will be treated only incidentally. Also, this study will include conceptions of the gods explicated principally within the last one-hundred years; one sees little use in dragging out all the petrified bones of Homeric scholarship, especially since early Homeric criticism can be found in survey books such as Gilbert Murray's *The Rise of the Greek Epic* and since the most exciting Homeric criticism has grown in the last one hundred years along with disciplines such as historical criticism and mythography. It is much
more exciting to discover a poet's own twist with what he has inherited than simply to determine what it was that he did inherit. More evidence of Homer's originality will be shortly forthcoming.

It would seem to the investigators of the Illiad that they have found the basis for the celebrated preacher's statement that there is nothing new under the sun. In Homer's poem one could trace the roots of tragedy, biography, psychology, theology, philosophy, or any sophisticated field of the verbal humanities. Stretching the point somewhat one might propose that Homer's poem is the basis for the sciences too, on the tenuous grounds that Homer formed the core for Greek educational curriculum during the most productive eras of Greek civilization, which saw among other developments the advent of mathematics and medicine. Hence, anyone who braves to take up the Illiad once again in order to attempt a fresh approach to one of its aspects, namely, Homer's use of the gods, finds himself in the awkward position of wondering whether such freshness can be achieved. In the following summary of some major critical proposals about Homer's understanding of the gods one can see implicitly the suggestion of how near together, rather than how far apart, the critics of Homer have been to each other, and how little indeed there is that is truly new in Homeric criticism. The

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critics are most divergent in emphasis of theory rather than in substance of theory, but shifts of emphasis have their own freshness and often hold the key for greater acumen in any given area of thought.

Before embarking on a summary of the various views of Homer's manipulation of the gods, one needs a deeper review of some concepts of the poet's attitude toward his work, his own unique flavor and method of work, his place in the history of literature. Of course, it is traditionally believed that Homer's Iliad is the first great work of literature in Western history. Modern criticism seems to affirm this axiom.

J. A. K. Thomson supports this idea by remarking that Matthew Arnold's lectures on translating Homer were the first adequate estimate, at least in English, of the literary qualities of the Iliad and Odyssey and did much to destroy the notion of a native genius or inspired folk-poet. Homer was now seen to be a conscious artist and took his place once for all as the chief poet of antiquity, as Dante was of the Middle Ages and Shakespeare of modern times. 3

As the chief poet Homer naturally influenced the tone, if not the substance, of subsequent literature.

What was Homer's attitude in the Iliad? There are several tacks one could take in answer to the question. Charles Beye believes that Homer took an objective and impersonal view toward his material.

Nowhere in the Iliad does Homer sentimentalize his story. The theme is war, which in turn means killing. Homer accepts this always as the natural rhythm of his narrative. Death, being inevitable, is neither good nor bad. Life, on the contrary, is a blessing; leaving it is sad. Which is to say, life is always to be preferred. They who would like to believe that Homer glorifies death are sentimental. Over and over he contrasts the wastage and the sorrow of war with the beauty and humanity of peace. He simply accepts war as natural.

The quotation implies that Homer realized objectivity by avoiding the injection of sentiment into the epic. Homer's views can be derived from the evidence of what is included in or excluded from his poem, but he never uses the poem to theorize. C. M. Bowra expresses the same view in the sentence, "The story is always the poet's first consideration and is never a peg for his philosophy." One finds in the preceding opinions in these expressions concerning the Homeric method:

(1) "The Homeridae, being sacrosanct servants of Apollo, could risk satire, so long as they remained serene and unsmiling throughout their performances, pointed no finger, cocked no eye, tipped no wink," and

(2) "Homer dislikes scandalous tales and expurgates everything that

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5 C. M. Bowra, Ancient Greek Literature (New York, 1960), p. 27.

offends his sense of propriety." The former quotation reveals the Homeric attitude as carefully detached while the latter quotation reveals the Homeric method of implying rather than specifying meaning. Bowra sums up the Homeric stance by saying,

His [Homer's] great effects are of emotion expressed in action, and he secures his object through his characters without ever obtruding his own judgments on life or on them. So in the end he remains impersonal. We know his tastes, what men he liked, what he noticed in the world, but of what he thought, what judgments he passed, what he hoped or feared for his time or his art, he says not a word.

Hence, Homer's method laid the foundation for a rule of literary art that writers of fiction have aspired to through centuries of recorded letters--the rule is to write so that the characters and the action carry the meaning without the writer's overtly doing the job for the reader. In this method seems to rest the difference between poetry and philosophy.

Once one understands the excellence of Homer through studying his disinterested method, one can understand how his readers have seen different emphases in the Iliad. One can comprehend how, on the one hand, one reader could say, "Homer knows and proclaims that there

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8 C. M. Bowra, Ancient Greek Literature, pp. 39-40.
is that in men which loves war, which is less afraid of the terrors of combat than of the long boredom of the hearth," which seems to indicate a Homeric preference for war. One can comprehend how, on the other hand, another reader of Homer could comment that "an inveterate hatred of war appears throughout the Iliad; and Homer smuggles into Book XXIII a bitter comment on the monstrous slavery it entails, by awarding the winner of the wrestling match a copper cauldron worth twelve oxen, and the loser a captive Trojan noblewoman valued as highly as four, because she is skilled at the loom." Although perceiving Homer's method helps one understand how people see different ideas in his poems, seeing the Homeric method does, also, make it much more difficult to decide what the poet himself thought about any specific issue.

A problem intricately related to the question of Homer's attitude as it is reflected in his poetic method is the question of how much of what is thought to be Homer's is really his. In other words, how much of Homer's material is purely traditional or historical and how much is original or fictional? This question has previously been alluded to in this paper, and certainly the question has been laid to rest by several of

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the best Greek scholars of the last century. But it behooves one to be at least casually explicit about the matter of originality in the epics of Homer, since determining the originality of the poem figures prominently in explicating the poem. Gilbert Murray writes feelingly of Homer's originality, pointing out that originality does not mean novelty, but rather an intensity of imagination. The intensity of imagination creates an atmosphere in which a reader or listener feels he is in a different, unique, and real world. Murray says that "ultimately the greatness of a poem or work of imaginative art depends mostly upon two questions: how strongly we feel ourselves transported to this new world, and what sort of a world it is when we get there, how great or interesting or beautiful." He goes on to comment that the Iliad and Odyssey create so singular a response that one easily comprehends why the poems have been considered the greatest works of art ever created. Murray illustrates the originality of Homer by showing how he has created a more splendid world by saying just what it takes to get the reader's mind active and no more. Homer did not overwrite his poem.

Contrary to Murray's idea of Homer's originality is Sir Maurice Bowra's belief that

12 Ibid., p. 25.
13 Ibid., pp. 251-254.
The use of writing means that a poet tries above all to say something new in his own original way; the oral tradition makes no such assumptions and no such demands. When we read Homer, we may indeed enjoy it very much as we enjoy other poetry, but we can hardly ever say that it is because of the poet's originality; for in the last analysis we may never be certain what is his own invention and what he has taken from tradition. Indeed, however original an oral poet may be, he must always conform to the traditional manner and his inventions must be adapted to it and made to look at home in it. This means that, when we speak of the poet or poets of the Homeric poem, we must always remember that any passage or phrase may well be inherited from other poets before them.

Writing in the same *A Companion to Homer*, A. B. Lord seems to be arguing directly with Bowra in the following words,

The deeper our study of oral composition penetrates, the more we come to realize that this traditional method of composition allows the individual singer some latitude and play for his original talents. The method aids the singer to tell his story; but even when the tradition furnishes the main outlines of the story, the resulting performance in the singer's own. He is not the mouthpiece of tradition; he is the tradition.

The formulaic technique allows for innovation and for the entry of new words into the scheme of the formulae. While the tradition may be conservative in that the singer is not consciously striving to coin a new phrase, knowingly seeking to be original, yet he is not stifled by the tradition if he wishes to express something new. He does not need writing to find the felicitous phrase.

The thematic technique too is flexible enough, so that it is possible to say that the treatment given any story in a particular text is that of the individual singer, even though the story be as old as time itself, and in spite of forces which tend to make a tradition conservative.


Murray, Bowra, and Lord all agree that Homer stood under a strong traditional influence as a result of the very nature of oral composition, but Murray and Lord do not see that influence as any kind of handicap to Homer's originality. Perhaps the best and certainly one of the more interesting discussions about the relation of the epic tradition and Homer's originality is Rhys Carpenter's *Folk Tale, Fiction, and Saga in the Homeric Epics*.

In his book, Carpenter defines saga as that which "derives from the past" and fiction as that which "is mainly dependent on the present." Saga is received in the present from a process of its having passed from generation to generation. The process promotes vagueness and confusion. Fiction is dependent only on the immediate experience of an artist, and though by definition fiction is altered experience, it may be more real than the distorted saga. Carpenter affirms that there has been "a profound fictional disturbance and transformation of the traditional material of Saga and Folk Tale" in the *Iliad* in the sense that there is as "emotional compression and expansion" as well as a "looking forward and backward in order to keep track of human motives and the complex interactions of human character." Saga and Folk Tale are much more limited in form than the *Iliad* is. Carpenter concludes,

16 Carpenter, *Folk Tale, Fiction, and Saga in the Homeric Epics*, p. 32.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 84.
In neither poem [the Iliad and Odyssey] should we ask for factual record or truthful history. Both--it seems strange that this still needs again and again to be discovered--are primarily works of literary art. Neither belongs to prehistory, nor to Mycenaean times nor yet to the poverty stricken centuries which immediately succeeded: both belong to Greece, which produced so soon after them Sappho and Aeschylus and Plato. 19

Thus has the temper of the discussion gone in reference to the question of originality in the Iliad. It seems reasonable now to rest on the conclusions of most contemporary Homeric scholars that in the Iliad there are the definite marks of a deeply sensitive and creative poet. On that ground one finds the question of what the poet thought about his gods to be quite apposite.

One can summarize that Homer emerges as a conscious creative artist who was very apt in presenting his views without intruding on the integrity of his audience by drawing conclusions for them. He stands at the head of Western literature as its chief poet. From him has derived some of the best efforts of literary art and literary criticism; Western literature seems to be firmly rooted in Homer. Although not all critics agree about Homer's topical emphases in the Iliad, those same critics do agree on the superior quality of the work. With these premises in mind, one turns to an examination of some critics' conceptions of Homer's use of the gods in the Iliad.

19 Ibid., p. 183.
Commentators have seen that Homer used the gods in expressions which served as purely poetical aids to what he wanted to say. Forsdyke, in tracing the pedigree and chronology of the Trojans and their allies, speaks of the meeting between Glaucos and Diomedes of Argos during which Diomedes recognizes Glaucos as a grandson of his own father's friend. During the confrontation, the two men exchange armour; Forsdyke notes that Homer "makes the characteristically Hellenic comment that 'Zeus robbed Glaucos of his wits, since he gave away his golden armour for the bronze of Diomedes, the worth of a hundred oxen for the worth of nine.'"

The import of Forsdyke's observation certainly includes the idea that Homer really did not think Zeus robbed Glaucos of his wits, but Homer's saying so expressed the idea of a poor economic exchange in an idiom, and thus Homer achieved a more powerful poetic effect than he would have had he simply stated that Glaucos was a dull thinker when it came to trading.

Another example of Homer's sometime use of the gods is given by Robert Graves. Excavations at the site of Troy have never revealed any trace of the fortifications that Homer's Achaians constructed there. Evidence shows that Homer's Greek fortifications were fictional. Graves comments that "for listeners who knew the site of Troy well,"

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he [Homer] remarks how as soon as the war ended, Poseidon angrily washed away all trace of the earthworks. "21 Thus, Homer used Poseidon as a face-saver for himself, to explain why no trace of the fortifications could be found at the battle site.

Also, Homer used the gods as personifications of human emotions. This is especially the case in regard to his depictions of Ares and Aphrodite. Whitman points out that Ares is war in the sense of the emotions it creates in man and his society—turbmoil, defeat, disgrace, bitterness. Ares is a god, but he represents men's war emotions; he is present wherever there is rout and terror. 22 Aphrodite, too, has the proportions of a definite character, but just as Ares is hate, she is romantic love. Both Paris and Helen are saturated with amorous feelings which Aphrodite represents; even if Aphrodite leaves them they are possessed by love's passion, and the Trojans, like Hektor, hold them personally responsible for their feelings. Helen and Paris belong to Aphrodite; they belong to romance. 23

The preceding three references to Homer's uses of the gods align him with many other authors. This study has noted that (1) he used

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22 Whitman, Homer and the Heroic Tradition, p. 235.

23 Beye, The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition, p. 148.
them in idiomatic expressions for poetic effect, (2) he used them to solve simple problems of geographical realism, and (3) he used them as projections of man's feelings. Nevertheless, a sharper delineation of Homer's use of divinities is drawn when the critics make distinctions between the men and the gods of the Iliad. Most critics agree that the gods were essentially anthropomorphic, meaning they were conceived by Homer to have human bodies, human feelings, human passions, human personalities. Critics do not always agree, however, on the qualities of the gods which set them apart from purely anthropomorphic beings. In one place in his book on Homer, Andre Michalopoulos says,

. . . they differed from human beings in that they were immortal, eternally beautiful and young, and were invested with the capacity to move swiftly from heaven to any point on earth. They were invisible at will. The gods lived in the upper air (aither); men in the lower (aer). The gods ate ambrosia, drank nectar, and enjoyed the savor of burnt offerings. 24

A few pages later, Michalopoulos appears to be disagreeing with himself as he comments,

The only difference between the Olympians and men lies in the power of the gods to control the elements. Zeus raises a golden cloud to conceal his amours and provides a deliciously flowery, if somewhat damp, couch for their fulfillment. Hera, on the other hand, is able to send sleep to Poseidon; and he, in turn, has the power to change the course of the war. 25

25 Ibid., p. 64.
Of course, Michalopoulos is adding to his first list another difference between the gods and men. The power of the gods to control the elements is a difference Michalopoulos terms "fictionally introduced" in order to lend charm and variety to the epic. Evidently, the critic considers the latter item to be Homer's original contribution to Greek caricature of the gods.

Following somewhat the same tack as Michalopoulos, W. K. C. Guthrie noted that Homer's gods are separate from Homer's men in rank, prestige, and power. Quoting Herodotus, who had Solon say, "I know that deity is full of envy and unstableness," Guthrie goes on with the idea that there was an unbridgeable gulf between the mortals and the immortals which found expression in the idea that the surest way to raise the jealous ire of the immortals was for the mortals to forget their mortality. Man's forgetting his mortality, of course, led him to presume upon the powers of the gods. The gods are "easy livers" who never know death, while man is like the leaves of the trees and earth: man is for a season. Guthrie's shift of emphasis from the idea of the strictly superhuman acts of the gods to the idea of their immortality gets very close to a Homeric thematic emphasis in the Iliad. A principal theme of the Iliad is man's mortality; Homer

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26 Ibid.
characterizes man's ephemeral nature more poignantly by contrasting it with the gods' immortality.

One finds in Whitman references to at least two more Homeric uses of divinities. In one instance, Whitman says, "It is not by theology, but by a telescopic view of existence, that the gods mingle with and transcend the world of men."\(^{28}\) It is true that the gods have the poet's view of the action of the poem, never forgetting all that is going on, never letting a single emotion get in the way of the total progress of existence. This telescopic view, however, is usually adhered to by Zeus only. The rest of the gods seem quite willing to forestall the larger purpose of life, and therefore of the poet's story, but Zeus holds them to that purpose.

In another instance, Whitman remarks of Thetis, "Of all the superhuman figures of the Iliad, she is the most available to suffering, and in her reflection of the tensions in Achilles' soul, she all but becomes what is a contradiction in terms a tragic divinity."\(^{29}\) The quotation demonstrates that Homer's gods do suffer in some humane way. Their woundings and their cryings can be taken lightly in the face of their immortality, but to do so is to gloss some of the real pathos of the poem; consequently, it is to gloss some of the real involvement in the


\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 244.
lives of men of the gods themselves. An injured child might suffer in a different way from his parents who suffer with him in his injury. The child may think his pain to be unending. The parents know it to be short-lived, but their greater knowledge does not reduce their own suffering, through identity, with the child. In the same way, one can see that the gods do suffer to the extent of their identification with man. Whitman thinks Thetis' identification with Achilles is close, indeed.

C. M. Bowra suggests the most popular and the most controversial view of Homer's understanding of his gods when he writes that Homer's overall picture of the gods is one in which they are little concerned with good or evil in either men or themselves. The gods do what they wish, and their lives are what men's would be could they follow their desires without risk of failure.  

Bowra is in much good company, for there are many concurring voices that Homer depicts his gods as a frivolous bunch of deities.

Charles Beye remembers that when Achilles was fighting in anguish in the river Xanthos, trying to force meaning into his life, Homer sets over against this anguished man a group of ridiculous, absurd, impotent gods who fit these adjectival modifications because they have no way, as does Achilles, to measure or test their living.

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31 Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition*, p. 142.
Earlier in his discussion of the immortals, Beye had described the gathering of the gods at the end of Book I of the Iliad as a parody of the Greek quarrel which, unlike the latter, climaxed in riotous behavior.

"One is hard put," says Beye, "to understand what Homer is about when he introduces the gods in this fashion."\(^{32}\) Beye believes that apologists for the gods' frivolity are patronizing Homer's view of the gods. He says the poet is being seriously comic in order to save heroic behavior, not to mock it.

Belief in heroism characterizes intense young men; mature men of experience and vision accept the multiplicity of existence and reject heroism's rigid absolutism. The narrow heroic mind could not sustain a view of life as pervasive as the Iliad. Yet the heroic spirit animates the poem, and provides the central tension. Homer uses his divinities to relax the grandeur of the human behavior, so as to keep it from slipping itself into caricature. Man's limitations are exposed when gods who are little different from man in these scenes act out his vulnerability. Yet paradoxically, that Olympos should be so flawed gives man the greater stature.\(^{33}\)

Therefore, Beye insists that Homer viewed his gods as basically comic characters, but that his comic view of them preserved his heroic view of man by affording the narrow heroism of the men with a necessary poetic relief.

C. M. Bowra, writing in an earlier book than the one by him mentioned above, saw the same paradox in Homer's use of the gods as

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 125.  
\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 126.
Beye describes. Bowra said that one could see it as a stroke of genius that Homer described the gods as irresponsible, amusing, unimportant and also answered conscience's demand that the gods should control human actions and arbitrate justice. What Homer did was to create a paradox without attempting to resolve the contradiction. "He developed his views of divinity and its importance for morality and religion on quite different lines, and left it at that."34 That Homer observed all the formalities of morality and religion and yet tempered them with curiosity and humor Bowra thought to be indicative of an age when faith was still vigorous. 35 Gilbert Murray, too, calls Homer's depiction of the gods an "easy scepticism" rather than an indecorous manipulation. Murray says the human beings are dignified, but the gods practice torture, cheat, lie, and imprison each other. They are routed by human beings and they howl when they are wounded. All this Murray sees as evidence of Homer's "easy scepticism."36 One more voice to add to those of Beye, Bowra, and Murray is John Forsdyke. Comparing Homer's Iliad to what is known of the rest of the Cyclic episodes, Forsdyke concludes that Homer's deities were fashioned after the images

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of his first audiences: "... their morals were loose but their intelligence and sense of propriety were acute." Homer differed from other poets of the Cycle in his refusal to brutalize and misuse the gods' power, in his having them appear to individual mortals alone and usually in disguise. As has been indicated earlier in this paper, Andre Michalopoulos holds the view that Homer's use of the gods is for the purpose of artistic diversion, a backdrop for the tragedy of man's life. In their behaving like overgrown, rambunctious children the gods provide a poetic relief for the serious nobility of the Greek and Trojan heroes. Thus, there is a tone of amelioration in the theories of these critics derived from their ideas that the frivolity of the gods serves a serious purpose in the Iliad.

However, other critics think that the overriding emphasis of Homer's use of the gods is singularly ridiculous and capricious. George Steiner writes, "The quarrels and lusts of the Olympians are, at times, satirized in the Iliad. But more often, the deities are seen as arrogant and daemonic forces destroying or favoring men at their caprice." Rachael Bespaloff quotes Priam's words to Helen, "I do

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37 Forsdyke, Greece Before Homer: Ancient Chronology and Mythology, p. 130.
38 Ibid., pp. 129-130.
39 Michalopoulos, Homer, pp. 56-57.
40 Steiner, "Introduction: Homer and the Scholars," p. 11.
not blame you. I blame the gods who launched the Achaean war, full of tears, upon me." Bespaloff interprets Priam's words as signals that the real culprits of the Iliad are the deities, whose main fault lies in their being exempt from care.  

Perhaps the critic who takes the greatest risk in supporting the idea that Homer's use of the gods was supremely satirical and ludicrous is Robert Graves.

Graves is adamant in his insistence that Homer was utterly cynical about the gods. To Graves Homer is not reflecting an aspect of men's lives in the behavior and hierarchy of the gods; he sees Homer as having allowed the gods to behave "far worse than the one royal family to whom he introduces us, namely the Trojan." The gods' behavior is not merely frivolous, but downright base and debauched.

Graves' viewpoint of Homer's picture of the Olympians speaks for itself:

Zeus...hurls horrible threats at his wife Hera and the rest of the Olympian family, too well aware of their jealousies, grudges, deceptions, lies, outrages, and adulteries. Hera is a termagant, so cruel and sly that she manages to convert her only virtues, marital chastity and an avoidance of direct lies, into defects. She would like to eat the Trojans raw--and all because, long ago, Paris rejected the bribe she offered for a verdict in her favour, and instead gave Aphrodite the prize of beauty. We are left wishing that Hera would commit adultery with some River-god or Titan, to be taken in the act, and thus compel Zeus to chain her down forever in the

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Pit of Hell. Zeus' spoilt daughter Athene shares Hera's grudge against Paris—she also entered for the beauty prize—and Homer does not ask us to approve of her mean behaviour when the lovable Hector at last faces Achilles, a far stronger champion than himself, and she robs him of his advantage. Athene shines in comparison only with the foolish and brutal Ares. Of the three Olympians who come pretty well out of the tale, Apollo the Archer was the Homeridae's patron; Hephaestus the Smith ruled Lemnos, one of the Ionian Islands; and Hermes the Helper had invented the lyre and protected travellers. Then there is Poseidon, whom Homer clearly despises for not standing up to Zeus, and for being so touchy about his reputation as a master-mason; but abstains from ridiculing him because the Pan-Ionian Festival falls under his patronage.

Homer's audiences burned sacrifices to the gods, and celebrated annual festivals; yet they felt, it seems, no more and no less religiously sincere than most cradle-Catholics and cradle-Protestants do today—though supporting their Churches for the sake of marriage and funerals, keeping Christmas and Easter holidays, and swearing oaths on the Bible. Libations and sacrifices, the Ionians agreed, might be useful means of placating angry gods—a splash of wine and the thighbones of the victims on which one feasted cost little—and in the interests of law and order one should never swear false oaths, nor break the sacred bonds of hospitality. But they appear to have lacked any spiritual sense, except such few of them as had been admitted to the Eleusinian, Samothracian, Orphic, or other soul-stirring Mysteries. That Demeter and Persephone and Iacchus, the main figures in these Mysteries, are kept out of Homer's Divine Harlequinade, suggests that he, and his sons after him, were adepts—hence their poor view of official religion.

One sees in Graves' statement a much stronger position on Homeric theology than was evident in the positions of the other critics. If Graves is correct in his conception, many people are necessarily wrong in their conceptions. Without judging Graves' criticism at this point, one can

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Ibid., pp. 18-19.
certainly appreciate his stance. There is something very refreshing in a scholar's refusal to pussyfoot on matters where most scholars seem to be hedging. Nevertheless, Graves' view, however well put and strongly believed by its author, is one among many views of Homer's use of the gods; one doesn't have to look far to find views different from or even completely contrary to that of Graves.

For instance, A. B. Lord understands Homer to be no exception to the rule that the Greek oral epics taught the wisdom of the Achaians, that the epics embody moral lessons. Lord goes on to emphasize that epic kept its moral, didactic purpose throughout the ages. He seems to take a similar course with Bowra who surmises that "the gaiety of the Olympian scenes in the Iliad does not necessarily exclude a divine interest in right and wrong." In fact, Bowra believes that Homer ascribed Troy's imminent destruction to the Judgement of Paris and that therefore the gods' involvement, especially Hera's, Athene's and Aphrodite's, was indeed serious, with moral overtones for the gods. Therefore, when Lord cites Homer as "the epitome of all epic," he means that Homer's gods, as well as his human heroes, have an ultimately serious purpose which provides the foundation for later

44 Lord, "Homer and Other Epic Poetry," p. 207.
45 Sir Maurice Bowra, "Composition," p. 64.
46 Ibid., p. 65.
epic poets, Virgil and Milton included, to build their own frame-
works on.

One finds still different informing principles in the theories of
other critics. According to Guthrie, H. J. Rose discovered the key to
Homer's use of the gods in the idea of the organization of Homeric
society. Guthrie explains that the gods and men together formed one
society; there were strongly marked class-distinctions from the top of
the divine society to the bottom of the human society. The class-distinctions
among the gods were relevant in determining questions of mutual
relationships, questions of duty and morality both between the gods and
men, and among the gods themselves and among the men themselves.
Guthrie argues further that there is no hint of a man aspiring to divinity
in Homer. The reason for this is that there was in Homer's gods a
touch of human nature, rather than a touch of the divine in man. Thus
man does not aspire to usurp the prestige of the higher beings, for to
do so would be treason—disloyalty to the lord, the unforgivable crime.
In the Iliad men are normally punished by the gods for personal offenses
against the gods, not because they have sinned in the sense of having
broken an unwritten, abstract moral code. Thus it is that Guthrie

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47 Lord, "Homer and Other Epic Poetry," p. 211.
49 Ibid., pp. 120-121.
sees the divine society as an extension of a sort of human society and
develops a theory of the gods based on a Homeric projection. This kind
of thinking is most elaborately worked out in the conception of Cedric
Whitman.

Whitman proposes that Homer's use of the gods can best be under-
stood as a one-to-one objectifying of a hero in the personality of a god.
"The god who assists a hero on the battlefield or elsewhere is, for the
moment at least, no more than a symbol of that hero's ability, or of the
special circumstances in which he finds himself." In Whitman's
scheme, Athene is an objectification of Diomedes; Aphrodite, of Paris
and Helen; Apollo, of Hektor; and Zeus, of Achilles. Critics who use
the objectifying principle to a lesser extent than Whitman, following the
idea of the divine and human societies' being analogous to each other,
usually align Zeus with Agamemnon because each is the respective
head of his society. However, Whitman argues that

The relation between Zeus and Achilles is the most extended
and subtle of all Homer's characterizations by divinity. It
makes the Iliad what it is by setting at its core the supreme
dignity of the isolated individual spirit. Sometimes it is
said that Achilles vanishes from the whole middle part of
the poem, but this is not true. He is there in the form of
a translated Zeus, governing the phases of the long battle
with his lightning; his whole character, state of mind, and
relation to circumstances is enormously projected into
the concrete image of the god.

50 Whitman, Homer and the Heroic Tradition, p. 221.
Whitman is not merely content with the risk implied here by his making Zeus the projection of Achilles' character, for he continues with his remarks to broaden the scope of the objectification of Zeus in this manner:

And yet, for all his temporary identification with Achilles, Zeus continues to reflect the totality of things, and not the Wrath alone. He can shed a bloody rain in lamentation for Sarpedon, and console the long-suffering Ajax with an omen of ultimate victory. One of the great virtues of Greek polytheism, and of Homer's use of it, is that no god, least of all Zeus, is ever a perfectly univocal symbol. Multiple meanings constantly merge with one another as the facets of the divine nature light up on response to the phenomena of the world.

Thus, one sees that Whitman draws parallels between the personalities of Achilles and Zeus, but protects himself by admitting to Homer's multiple objectifications of men in Zeus. Homer's use of the gods through the principle of objectifying Whitman believes to be an unconscious poetic process, but by far the most singularly important literary manipulation of the deities in the Iliad. Whitman's view of the Homeric gods is that they represent the full emotions of the men they objectify and also the limits of those emotions, as well as sometimes embodying the ideas of victory in battle and poetic justice; they do all this without sacrificing their own personalities as separate divine beings. One can see from this paper's earlier citations from

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51 Ibid., p. 230.
52 Ibid., p. 238.
53 Ibid., p. 299.
54 Ibid., pp. 221-222.
Whitman, along with those immediately preceding this sentence, that he embraces most of the views concerning Homer's use of the gods, unifying the views under his idea of Homer's objectifying the heroes in the gods. A question that must be asked of Whitman's view is whether it really succeeds in keeping the necessary distance between god and men. This question can best be illustrated by turning to Gilbert Murray.

Murray has pointed out that Homer made the dividing lines between men and gods sharp and clear. In a particularly apt passage so typical of Murray, whose writing on Greek literature is intensely alive, Murray states,

There are no persons in the Iliad or Odyssey, as there are in the rest of Greek tradition, who appear now as one and now as the other. There is a definite avoidance of the makeshift bridge which satisfied Hesiod: "the divine race of heroes, who are called demi-gods." Kings may be descended from gods, and specially favored by particular gods. But that is all. The peasants of the Peloponnese continued long after Homer's time to worship at the altars of a being called Zeus-Agamemnon. They may have been far from clear as to the distinction between the God Cronos and his son Pelops at Olympia. But in the Iliad Zeus, son of Cronos, is quite definitely a king of gods; Agamemnon, son of Pelops, definitely a king of men. There is no shade of confusion between them.

It was a remarkable achievement of Hellenic intellect, this clear realization that a man was not a god, and that it was no use calling him so. It needed such clearness of sight, such daring, such humanity. 55

Whether this quotation from Murray can be read as an indictment of Whitman's view depends on whether one understands Whitman to have confused the line between men and gods. That he did not intend to confuse the line is clear from his apologies for his position, but the possibility that he might have is open to scrutiny.

Wallace Anderson, writing in the 1950's, assigned Homer's gods three basic sides: (1) the gods are human, (2) the gods are superhuman, and (3) the gods are moral protectors. Their human side is evidenced in their emotions; they cry, laugh, cavort, love, plan, quarrel, and generally act in the manner of men. According to Anderson, this humanization of the gods creates sympathy and understanding in Homer's readers. The gods' superhuman side is depicted in their omniscience and ubiquitousness, their superhuman acts, their miraculous deeds. This superhuman side, in effect, sets the gods apart from men. The third side of the gods, the moral protector side, is Homer's way of deepening the moral tone and tragic effect of his poem. Homer's gods, Anderson believes, help keep the proper respect, aidos, among men, and between men and gods, in clear view of the poet's tragic purpose. The lack of aidos in man results in his succumbing to pride, hubris; the moral tone of the poem, therefore, hangs on Homer's


57 Ibid., p. 392.
men and gods keeping a proper balance between what man owes to his betters and what he actually deserves for himself. If Achilles, for instance, misunderstands his true obligations to Agamemnon, the result is that Achilles oversteps his place; therefore he becomes wrong in the moral framework of the poem. The gods, who like Homer himself have the overview of men's actions, become the arbiters of men's moral balance of character. Summarizing his view of Homer's use of the gods in the Iliad, Anderson says,

The gods in the Iliad are not extraneous figures placed there merely for the sake of variety or imaginative flights, though Homer does make the most of this. They are woven deeply into the texture of the poem, and they serve a multiple function. By means of the gods Homer has strengthened the structure and unity of the work, has given it an ethical tone and color, and has heightened the tragedy. He has given added plausibility to events, created surprise and suspense, and complicated the action.

Hence, Anderson's position is essentially opposed to that of Graves; he is more in line with the critics who, like A. B. Lord, find in Homer's Iliad a moral wisdom.

Speaking in an article entitled, "Morality, Men, and Gods in the Iliad," W. C. Grummel takes direct issue with Anderson. Criticizing Anderson's idea that the gods of Homer have a moral effect on the poem, Grummel states, "Homer is conscious of the manifold aspects of the deities which he uses, and uses them artistically to serve various ends;
but only rarely are the moral aspects of their relationship with men
mentioned. Grummel admits that the system of values that
Anderson describes has many adherents among critics of Homer, but
Grummel expresses doubt that Homer's audience had such a nice moral
system worked out in their minds. Grummel argues that Achilles felt
no guilt in regard to his dispute with Agamemnon—neither did he feel
that the argument drew the moral attentions of the gods. Anderson's
idea of the gods being moral protectors Grummel attacks by pointing
out that in the Iliad there is no development of an ethical system—
neither do the gods punish men for abnegating moral propriety.
Grummel asserts,

We cannot use the conduct of the gods as a moral
touchstone in judging the human actors, because it is
far inferior to that of the heroes. From the time of
Xenophon of Colophon to the present there has been
substantial agreement on this. We need not be concerned
about their relationships with one another, reprehensible
though these be at times. But we do have the right to
expect moral gods to deal justly with men. But even
here their conduct is not only irresponsible but also
malevolent. If the gods are really responsible for
the moral tone of the Iliad, how do we account for
the action of Zeus in sending a deceptive dream to
Agamemnon, of Athene in inciting Pandarus to
break the truce, of Hera in displaying a constant and
almost insane malevolence toward the Trojans? The
answer, of course, is that the gods are not the guardians
of the moral order nor the dispensers of justice to men.

60 W. C. Grummel, "Morality, Men, and Gods in the Iliad,"
The Classical Outlook, XXXII (May, 1955), 77.
Their relationship with men is based quite nakedly on their power. They interfere in human affairs entirely capriciously, without concern for the moral worth of the human actors. 61

A reader of both Anderson's and Grummel's articles would see that Grummel supports his view with specific references to the Iliad while Anderson makes inferences that require some imagination. Grummel, however, speaks further of Homer's use of the gods, reaching the conclusion that many of the gods' actions are explicable on artistic grounds. 62 He believes the moral code of the heroes in the Iliad is human, i.e., based on human rather than divine sanctions. Also, the Homeric hero's morality is generally personal, transcending any particular systematic code. 63

One sees that, above all, the critics disagree about Homer's use of the gods in the Iliad. It seems that there are almost as many views of Homer's use of the gods as there are critics of Homer. Certainly, however, it is clear that many critics do agree on some points; all see some of what others vehemently insist on. Too, it is sometimes evident that some of the arguments appear more solidly rooted in the evidence of the Iliad, and for this reason they seem more credible. But without being overdramatic, one can surmise that the argument is rich indeed. It should be. Its roots are in the depth of one of the world's most arable soils--Homer's Iliad.

61 Ibid., p. 78. 62 Ibid. 63 Ibid., pp. 78-79.
CHAPTER III

HOMER'S USES OF THE GODS IN SPECIFIC EPISODES OF THE ILIAD--AN EXPLICATION

No one who reads the Iliad should fail to be impressed by the very first book of the poem. So much in the first book actually sets the stage for all the action and the general mood of the poem that it serves as a model for all literature that would leap right into its substance without first establishing the identity of its characters or giving a history of events on which its plot depends. There is no Shandyism here. There is pure and immediate conflict; one understands the characters, both men and gods, in terms of the conflict and proceeds to get involved in the emotions of those characters without really caring how the larger problem of the war began. The effect of such a beginning is at once demanding and satisfying. It is demanding because of its emotional gravity. It is satisfying because the author has obviously assumed his audience to be emotionally and intellectually capable of accepting a minimum of justification for what is immediately happening in Book I. Through this baptism of fire, one meets the society of Homer's gods.

Apollo it is who sent a pestilence to the Achaians in return for Agamemnon's kidnapping Chryses' daughter and refusing to return the
girl for a ransom. (Chryses was a priest of Apollo.) The Greeks, in seeking a reason for the pestilence, are in conflict with each other; the conflict is serious enough that it threatens to destroy their military effectiveness unless it can be settled. Agamemnon, leader of the Achaian forces, is determined to keep the girl. Achilles, the Greeks' most fearsome warrior, thinks it best to give the girl up, end the plague, and get on with the first business, the war. Of course, Agamemnon reasons that Achilles' willingness for Agamemnon to give up Chryseis is purely capricious; consequently, Agamemnon warns Achilles that he will give Achilles a lesson in feeling if the girl is taken away from him. He, in turn, will take Briseis, a girl Achilles had won as a prize from an earlier skirmish. Finally, after much verbal sparring, Agamemnon gives up Chryseis and takes Briseis, firmly anchoring the feelings of bitterness between himself and Achilles. Through all this one gets the idea that the conflict between the two men is Homer's main concern; therefore, Homer's emphasis is on that breach of feeling and what happens between the two men, especially as it affects their inward characters and particularly as it affects Achilles' behavior. Nevertheless, Homer also makes prolific use of the gods in this part of the poem. From a survey of Homer's uses of the gods in Book I, one can get an idea about how multifarious those uses of the deities are throughout the epic.
The first lines of the Iliad,

Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the Achaians, hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting of dogs, of all birds, and the will of Zeus was accomplished since that time when first there stood in division of conflict Atreus' son the lord of men and brilliant Achilleus.

(I, 1-7)

show Homer's understanding that Zeus' will, his choice, was responsible for the devastation which emerged from Achilles' anger at Agamemnon. It appears that Homer is saying that all things which happen among men do so within the providence and sight of the gods. Even though the angry Achilles, too, is responsible for the devastation of his fellows the gods know of the devastation and, in effect, approve it. This is not to say that Homer passed moral judgment on the gods. It is to say that he wasted no time creating a tension in the minds of his audience. The tension is that man, by his choices, effects results in his own life, but there is also something outside of both individual and communal man which, in some strange way, influences man. The

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1 Homer, The Iliad of Homer, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1951), p. 59. All subsequent citations from the Iliad unless otherwise noted are from this edition and will be designated by book number and line number immediately following each quotation.
gods represent those who exist beside man and his choices, those who influence him, but they do not force their own choices on man. Their will is accomplished independently of and in conjunction with man's choices at precisely the same time. Thus, a tension is created in man's life, and that tension is paradoxical. There is no simple way to resolve the tension. Homer did not resolve it. But he presented it as effectively as it ever has been. He acknowledged the contradiction and left it at that. It is interesting to note the varying ways in which he worked it out.

From Apollo's visiting a plague on the Greeks, one pictures the gods as being interested in the ethical actions of men. However, Apollo's concern that his priest be vindicated reflected his own selfish motives in the incident. In helping to right the moral transgression of Agamemnon against Chryses, Apollo was standing up for himself. It was his priest who had been offended. Therefore, one can conclude that Apollo was interested in the moral behavior of men at the point of his own involvement and self-interest in the matter. Homer probably realized that ethical considerations are consistently formulated on pragmatic grounds. Other evidence of this presents itself in Book I.

Homer not only attributes large matters to the gods, but small matters also. Achilles, seeking to find an answer to the plague, suggests that a prophet, some holy man, be called in to state the reason for the pestilence. Achilles says that even an interpreter of dreams will serve
the occasion, "since a dream also comes from Zeus" (I, 63-64).

Homer is probably adhering to a superstitious tradition with this comment and also preparing for the times when he will have the gods visit his heroes in dreams further along in the epic. Later, as the argument proceeds, Achilles, angry at Agamemnon for intimating that he would take Briseis, threatens to leave the war if Agamemnon does take her. Agamemnon says that there are men, as well as Zeus, who will stay with him in the war. He calls Achilles "... the most hateful of all the kings whom the gods love" (I, 176), which indicates that the Greeks believed the higher orders of men, the kings, to be special favorites of the gods. This is similar to the divine right of kings concept, but Homer does not see this role of the favorite as extending beyond the rules of governing. In other words, Homer's heroes are subject to the same laws of human respect as any men even though they have been given rule over other men by the gods.

Still another use of the gods becomes apparent when Homer has Agamemnon say to Achilles these words,

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Forever quarreling is dear to your heart, and wars and battles,
and if you are very strong indeed, that is a god's gift.
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(I, 177-178)

Agamemnon is using an old tactic of veiled vindictiveness in the last line. It means that if Achilles were a better warrior than Agamemnon,
it is not because of Achilles' own strength. The implication is that had Achilles had a human mother as did Agamemnon, then Agamemnon would have been stronger than Achilles. Evidently, at one time physical strength was attributed to the gods; Homer accepts this belief as something he can use in his poem. Whether or not he believed it himself, no one knows.

Earlier in the narrative, Homer had stated that Hera put it into Achilles' mind that the cause of Apollo's anger should be scrutinized. As a result of Hera's action, Achilles had called for the seer. Thus did Homer have the gods responsible, in a manner, for thoughts as well as dreams. At the instant of Agamemnon's invective toward Achilles, Hera sends Athene to keep Achilles from killing Agamemnon; Homer explains that Hera "loved both men equally in her heart and cared for them" (I, 196). Homer, then, states flatly how the goddess loved the men; a statement like this makes it extremely difficult to say the gods were entirely capricious or unconcerned about what happened in human life. The argument that Hera was saving them for some later sport, after which she would laugh as they were destroyed, does not hold too well, for both of these men survive the episodes of the Iliad. In fact, Hera sticks by the Achaians throughout the poem; she is always deeply involved with them. If she has her own game at heart, it does not matter if, to Homer, as has been indicated above, ethical premises depend on pragmatic considerations.
When Athene grabs Achilles by the hair, appealing to him not to kill Agamemnon, she informs him that whether or not he does kill the king is his choice (I, 207). He tells her,

"Goddess, it is necessary that I obey the word of you two, Angry though I am in my heart. So it will be better. If any man obeys the gods, they listen to him also." (I, 216-218)

This confrontation between the hero and the goddess shows Homer again creating a tension within the mind of the reader as to who or what is responsible for the events of man's life. The last line in the quotation has the form of a proverb, but Homer uses it to prepare his audience for Thetis' and Zeus' going along with Achilles' wish to prevent an Achaian victory in the war. Homer has his gods listen to his men at the points where he wants them to listen. Other times the gods do as they wish, contrary to man's desires.

There are more references to the gods' parts in men's lives in the first book. Nestor, trying to heal the breach between the two Greek heroes, appeals to the idea that the gods honor the man who governs the most men as a rule which should make Achilles accept the disgrace of Agamemnon (I, 279-284). Agamemnon, too, tells the Achaian leaders how Achilles, divinely strong though he be, has transgressed a holy law that prevails on men to refrain from verbal abuse of their betters (I, 290-291). Both these appeals to the gods are clear manipulations of the divine requirements to suit what Nestor and Agamemnon want for
themselves, namely, for Achilles to enter the battles as if he had not been offended. Therefore, Homer's men, like the gods, create moral law to fit their pragmatic and selfish desires.

When Agamemnon's men arrive at Achilles' quarters to take Briseis, Achilles gives her up uncontested, calling the men who have come for her, "heralds, messengers of Zeus and of mortals" (I, 334). This statement Achilles makes to take the fear out of the men's hearts; they were afraid Achilles would kill them. Calling them messengers of Zeus is an idiomatic way of saying that everything is all right; there are no hard feelings from Achilles to Agamemnon's men. Hence, Homer uses the gods to enliven his idiomatic expressions.

Another portrait of the gods is given when Odysseus takes Chryseis back to her home and makes sacrifices to Apollo. Apollo is drawn as a happy and satisfied figure, glad at the way all has worked out in his favor (I, 457-474). Still another picture, to contrast with this last portrait, is the one of Thetis, a goddess and Achilles' mother, after she has listened to Achilles' story of the rift between him and Agamemnon. Thetis cries for Achilles, agreeing to go to Zeus to beg help for her son. Hence, one sees that sometimes the gods are happy; sometimes they are sad.

With the above account of the gods in Book I of the Iliad, one perceives how deeply Homer leads his audience into his various uses
of the gods before finally, at the end of the book, he introduces his audience to Olympos, Zeus, and the society of the gods proper. The gods are absent from Olympos when Thetis arrives with Achilles' suit. But they soon return, Homer making a point of Zeus' singularity among the rest of the gods. Zeus leads the Olympians home then sits apart by himself on the highest peak of Olympos (I, 493-499). Thetis, clutching Zeus by his knees in the manner of a human suppliant, asks Zeus to honor Achilles by holding back the Achaians and strengthening the Trojans. But Zeus sits silently. She entreats him once again, and Zeus reveals that his original reluctance was based on his fear for his wife, Hera. Like a man who, becoming conscious of his fear of his wife's harangues, decides he is stronger than she and will prove it, Zeus promises Thetis to do as she has asked. Homer says,

He spoke, the son of Kronos, and nodded his head with the dark brows, and the immortally anointed hair of the great god swept from his divine head, and all Olympos was shaken.

(I, 528-530)

By Zeus' leading the gods, by his sitting confidently alone, by his poised deliberation over Thetis' query, by the thunderous fall of his hair, Homer has created for his audience an astounding, powerful, and exciting first-impression of the chief god. But by his having Zeus express concern over his wife's anger, Homer created a complicated god. He continues with the ostentatious characterization of Zeus by having the
Olympians stand up to greet Zeus as he enters his house. The ensuing quarrel between Zeus and Hera also commands the reader's respect for Zeus, for the end of the quarrel finds Hera and her companions cowed before the anger of chief Olympian. Homer, then, has successfully introduced his gods as a rather motley and disorderly group with Zeus as their head.

However, Book I is not yet completed. Homer ushers in Hephaestos to soothe the troubled feelings of the gods who are upset at Zeus' and Hera's dispute. Hephaestos says,

"This will be a disastrous matter and not endurable if you two are to quarrel thus for the sake of mortals and bring brawling among the gods. There will be no pleasure in the stately feast at all, since vile things will be uppermost."

(I, 573-576)

The crippled smith proceeds with his speech, praising Zeus' power and authority, until Hera smiles. Serving all the Olympians, Hephaestos brings laughter to them until the crisis has passed. The gods feast until the darkness sets in when they all go to their homes to sleep; Zeus and Hera sleep together.

There is a question implied in the quotation from Hephaestos' speech cited above: does Hephaestos' remark mean that Homer's gods take a capricious stance toward the heroes? In other words, can one read the quotation to mean that men's affairs are not fit for the gods to
worry over? Certainly the statement can be interpreted in this manner. But one might take Hephaestos' remark to be less pointed, to mean simply that nothing at all is serious enough to justify a breach among the society of the gods, not even beloved man's affairs. Homer might have been passing an iconoclastic judgment on his heroes' bitterness by picturing his gods as having good enough sense not to let trivial matters destroy their unity. Had Hera and Zeus proceeded to a showdown, in the same way that Agamemnon and Achilles did, the society of the gods, too, would have been in jeopardy. Hark! One thinks he hears a cosmic laugh from Homer. Once again has he created ambiguity without resolution.

Many of Homer's uses and characterizations of the gods appear in the first book of the Iliad. He wastes no time in plunging into the waters of complicated characterization. Presenting the basic paradox of the overriding teleological purposes of the men and gods, and thus his view of life as being complicated in nature, Homer adds enough small uses of the gods to spin the head of a practiced theologian. Nor does Homer relent from presenting this multiplicity of divine life throughout the rest of the poem...

On the contrary, Book II finds Zeus tricking Agamemnon into thinking that he can lead the Greeks to victory over the Trojans. Zeus has Dream appear to Agamemnon in the form of Nestor. Agamemnon believes Dream and Homer calls the king a
... fool, who knew nothing of all the things Zeus planned to accomplish,
Zeus, who yet was minded to visit tears and sufferings on Trojans and Danaans alike in the strong encounters.

(II, 38-40)

Again the lines appear to be an indictment of the gods, portraying Zeus as cruel and murderous. However, it is Agamemnon Homer derides for having believed the dream. Too, it is obvious to Homer's readers that Zeus is being faithful to Thetis, that his tricking Agamemnon into an ill-founded self-confidence centers in pragmatic considerations that will enable him to keep his earlier promise. Still another matter to be considered is that Agamemnon probably would have reacted to Achilles' withdrawal in exactly the same way he did; Homer is using the gods as an added literary intrigue and as one side of the juxtaposition of an ambiguous human freedom. By now one sees that Homer's gods are not just, at least in the sense that they might fulfill some abstract moral code by taking sides with men who are "right." In Book III both Achaians and Trojans pray,

"Zeus, exalted and mightiest, and you other immortals, let those, whichever side they may be, who do wrong to the oaths sworn first let their brains be spilled on the ground as this wine is spilled now, theirs and their sons', and let their wives be the spoil of others."

(III, 298-301)

Homer notes that "They spoke, but none of this would the son of Kronos accomplish" (III, 302). Thus, the gods of Homer's Iliad cannot be
cajoled from the overriding purposes of the poem or their original promises on the grounds that they should join the 'right' faction.

As Menelaos and Paris prepare for the duel that is to decide the victor, old Priam decides not to watch the fight, saying,

"Zeus knows--maybe he knows--and the rest of the gods immortal for which of the two death is appointed to end this matter."

(III, 308-309)

Priam, at least, recognizes the gods' inscrutable ways; he knows that the gods do not do as man wishes; he knows that the gods do things which make them curious to man. Priam doubts.

Of course, the conflict between Menelaos and Paris Homer concludes by having Aphrodite speed Paris from the sweaty battlefield to his perfumed bedchamber, leaving Menelaos and the two armies in outraged confusion. Aphrodite goes to Helen, getting her in turn, to go to Paris, and once again one sees that the goddess represents a part of the nature of human life that seems to control Helen in spite of her own better judgment. Helen sits in front of Paris, saying,

"So you came back from fighting. Oh, how I wish you had died there beaten down by the stronger man, who was once my husband. There was a time before now you boasted that you were better than warlike Menelaos, in spear and hand and your own strength. Go forth now and challenge warlike Menelaos once again to fight you in combat. But no: I advise you
rather to let it be, and fight no longer with fair-haired Menelaos, strength against strength in single combat recklessly. You might very well go down before his spear."

(III, 428-436)

The lines reveal that Helen feels trapped by Paris. She feels that he is an unworthy man, but she is strongly attracted to him. She might wish him dead, but she wants him too much to reject him out of her own volition. Too, the lines show that Helen did not charge Aphrodite for Paris' leaving the fray, but she blamed Paris, which indicates that Homer believed that as complicated as human freedom is man has the most important word on what he will do. The gods, which represent that which is outside of man or inscrutable to him, influence man; nevertheless, the final responsibility for man's actions lies in man's own choices. Helen and Paris go to bed together; their choice only appears to be forced on them by Aphrodite.

With Menelaos raging and the Greeks claiming victory because of Paris' disappearance, the gods hold a council. Zeus suggests that the victory be awarded the Achaians, but Hera and Athene, who were pro-Achaian, do not agree with Zeus' suggestion. (Zeus was not serious in offering to end the war (IV, 5-6), but was playing with Hera.) Hera and Athene sulk, saying that if Zeus stops the war the rest of the gods will not approve of him. This makes Zeus angry and he tells Hera,
"If you could walk through the gates and towering ramparts and eat Priam and the children of Priam raw, and the other Trojans, then, then only might you glut at last your anger."

(IV, 34-36)

He goes on to exalt the excellencies of Troy and its people, arguing against war. But Hera promises Zeus to let him sack some of her favorite Greek cities if he will but let the war go on. He agrees and Athene causes the war to begin again. This council of the gods makes the gods appear entirely capricious. They appear to have a chance to end bloodshed, but they do not. Rather, they seem to enjoy the prospect of injuring men for their own sport. The council makes the gods analogous to chess players who can move men back and forth on a board at will. But also the council makes the gods' involvement with each other significant. After all, Zeus was sporting with Hera and Athene, not man. He had already given the promise to Thetis; there is no indication he will change his mind; thus, the war will proceed. But when Hera took him seriously and consequently threatened him with disapproval, he raised serious moral questions concerning the war. True, the questions may be Homer's, but they are uttered by Zeus, showing that Zeus is not merely sporting. Zeus has a serious side concerning the war.
Thus far one sees that Homer manipulates the gods in many ways. One also sees that the gods add to the complexity of Homer's depiction of human life. The appearance of the gods in human circumstances heightens the intellectual and emotional complexity of the poem rather than reducing it. However, their interjection, which results in a more complex epic, does not render the tone of the poem more grave than it would have been without the gods. On the contrary, the gods are a relief to the seriousness of the heroes' involvements; they offer alternatives to the grave approach to life. One believes that possibly Homer saw the alternatives as options for his audiences, if the listeners were perceptive enough to apply the implications to their own lives.

Book V is in many ways a curious book in the Iliad. In Book V, Homer's gods become involved in the fighting in a way that they never do in the rest of the poem. They fight each other through the men who are in the battle, even wounding each other. Diomedes, the Achaian hero, is honored in the book, and it is he who visits havoc on the gods. As Aphrodite shields the wounded Aeneias, carrying him to safety, Diomedes wounds Aphrodite in the hand. Later, by Zeus' consent to Hera and with Athene's help, Diomedes wounds Ares, who bellows, retires to Olympos and whines to his father, Zeus. Also, the gods rescue their favorites, as Hephaestos saves Idaios, and as Apollo, Aphrodite, Artemis and Leto save Aeneias. What Homer is implying
by this action in Book V is difficult to decide. Several ideas present themselves.

First, when Aphrodite is wounded one wonders if the wounding means that with the renewed raging of the war Love had been struck a grievous blow. Aphrodite hastens to her mother, Dione, on Olympos to be comforted by her. Dione explains that involvement with men has traditionally produced suffering among the gods (V, 382-404). Oddly, Dione adds that men who fight against immortals are, as a consequence, short-lived. This is curious, especially since Homer consistently emphasizes the brevity of all human life; Dione's point seems weak in the face of the fact that all men's lives, whether or not they fight against gods, are short.

Second, one wonders if Homer is using the ironic suffering of the gods to promote the idea that the gods, too, must suffer if they are to have meaningful existences. In other words, it is difficult for the poet to conceive of any life, even immortal, that is not involved in conflict. Even if the gods' suffering cannot lead to ultimate defeat, death, the gods must enter the conflict. They must experience dying, which is feeling everything at once, even if they cannot experience death. After all, death is not experiencing anything; in fact, one guesses that it is a feeling nothing. But dying is feeling everything, risking; dying is, in this sense, living to the fullest. Thus, Homer's gods, in order to live
to the fullest, must risk, must suffer, as well as cavort and celebrate. The gods, then, have similar choices to those of men for determining the intensity of their own lives.

A third curiosity rising from the gods intervening in the war in Book V is their frequent comings and goings. For instance, in Athene's absence Apollo has the Trojans press their advantage. It seems that when the Trojans are backed by their gods, and the Greeks are not, the Trojans win, and vice versa. Why the gods do not stay with their favorites is not apparent. Athene retires from assisting Diomedes without any reason being given. She returns to aid Diomedes against Ares when she wants to. Hence, it seems that the gods leave the fracas just as a modern middle-class man leaves his television set to get a drink during a commercial--the war is not so important that the gods have to stick it out. At the end of Book V, in fact, the gods leave the war not to return en masse until Achilles, too, reenters the battle, and there is a renewed intensity to the fighting in Book XXI. Possibly the key to Homer's having his gods involved in the war en masse is his desire to intensify the battle scene and thus to heighten the dramatic content of the war. Once again, Homer's uses of the gods is divergent, but he does have Zeus act as his own artistic consciousness to keep the plot moving in conformity to Zeus' original promise, the promise that serves as the leaven for the development of Achilles' character.
Thus, Zeus and Homer keep the war moving toward the time when the Trojans will burn the Greek ships; they keep restraints on Hera who would have the Greeks win without the help of Achilles. The poetic purpose, the limits of the subject, i.e., Achilles' anger and its ramifications, are Homer's primary interests. He keeps to them with the help of Zeus; he makes the plot more interesting by teasing his audience with the idea that some other god may gain control and swerve the poem along some alternate route not in line with working out the anger of Achilles.

One of the more interesting episodes when the poem comes closest to aborting Zeus' will occurs in Book XIV. It is the episode of Hera's tricking Zeus. One suspects that the event is especially attractive to modern man's mind, conditioned as it is by the rise of modern psychoanalytic thought. Nevertheless, Hera has been admiring Poseidon's urging of the Achaians when she looks toward mount Ida and spots Zeus sitting alone. Remembering that Zeus has thwarted her every effort to educe a Greek victory, Hera's mood changes from delight to hatefulness, and she reflects over how she might beguile Zeus. Of course, she decides to seduce the mightiest of gods; Homer, then, carefully leads Hera through the most elaborate bodily preparations, all devised to heighten her enticement of her husband. Hera lies to Aphrodite in order to obtain Aphrodite's impassioned girdle of love. She bribes Sleep to
help her with Zeus. When she finally appears to her husband, he is 
overcome with desire, scarcely hesitating to learn what errand she is 
on before he invites her to bed. Soon the god and the goddess make 
love, after which Zeus sleeps; Sleep, under Hera's orders, goes to 
Poseidon, urging the god to prick the Achaians to overrun the Trojans, 
who now hold the advantage. The tide of war turns in favor of the Greeks. 
When Zeus awakens in Book XV, the Trojans are scattered and Hektor 
is dazed, breathing painfully and vomiting blood. Zeus is outraged, and 
only Hera's lie that she did not intend for Poseidon to help the Achaians 
saves her. Shaken, Hera returns to Olympos where she informs the 
other gods that they have been

"Fools, we who try to work against Zeus, thoughtlessly. 
Still we are thinking in our anger to go near, and 
stop him
by argument or force. He sits apart and cares nothing 
nor thinks of us, and says that among the other immortals 
he is pre-eminently the greatest in power and strength. 
Therefore 
each of you must take whatever evil he sends you."
(XV, 104-109)

Thus, one sees that the problem of the capriciousness of the gods 
applies not only in relation to the way gods behave to mortals, but also 
in relation to the way gods behave toward each other. But Zeus does 
care. He simply does not care more for others than he does for him-
self. He cares for others pragmatically and selfishly; it is a mistake, 
though, to think that a pragmatically based caring is somehow ineffective.
On the contrary, it is the most effective caring. Homer knows this. Therefore, Zeus cares for others at points of his personal investment in them (what he gets from them) and of his maintaining his own integrity. In other words, Zeus is interested in Hera for what he can get out of her. He is interested in man for what he can get out of man. He also is interested in keeping his promise to Thetis because of the same reasons anyone keeps promises. By keeping his promise Zeus encourages the trust of her to whom the promise has been made and he maintains his trust in himself, both of which make him feel good about himself, both of which develop his integrity. This Zeus does at the risk of appearing capricious to those who are not interested in the promise, who are interested in getting their ways. This mode of action is necessarily complicated; it necessarily appears contradictory and paradoxical. It is larger than moral code or law. Homer seems to have seen it clearly and to have portrayed it faithfully in the character of Zeus.

In summary, one notes that Homer uses the gods in many ways. He uses them as instigators of man's thoughts and dreams. He uses them in idiomatic expressions, to make his language more poetic or closer to the expressions of the people to whom he speaks. He has man use the gods as scapegoats for his own behavior—and so on ad infinitum. More importantly, however, Homer uses the gods as deus
ex machina in order to rescue his plot at those places it needs rescuing, and he uses them as literary devices in the sense of offering comic relief to the otherwise serious and tragic subject of the poem. And finally, Homer uses the gods in the same manner he uses his men, to depict the nature, the stuff, of human life as he saw it. In this last sense, Homer uses a god's will to indicate the complicated nature of human freedom by setting over against a single man's idea of what he thinks is best for himself that which demands something different from what he thinks is best. Aphrodite's will, for example, represents the sensual side of Helen's personality. And again in the last sense, within the make-up of a god himself, Zeus for example, Homer shows moral or capricious behavior to be dependent, for accurate interpretation, on how much and in what manner one understands pragmatic and selfish considerations to be the basis for all morality. Therefore, Homer develops and uses the gods mainly in accordance with his view of life in general.
CHAPTER IV

FATE AND DEATH: THEIR CENTRALITY IN
HOMER'S PORTRAYAL OF ACHILLES

Homer's gods are gods under control. In the first place, they are not alone; they have each other and man to contend with. This forces them to ameliorate and compromise their positions. Even though they talk of acting catastrophically, as when Zeus threatens the gods on occasion, they do not act on those fantasies. One apprehends the control under which the gods operate, for instance, in such a situation as Ares experiences in Book XV when, having learned of his son Askalaphos' death, he slaps his knees in anger, readies himself to wreck vengeance on Askalaphos' killers, but is restrained by Athene, who retains her emotional equilibrium. But the gods are not only under control in this anthropomorphic manner, i.e., as they are limited by others; they are under the control of fate.

Andre Michalopoulos says,

As regards men, he [Zeus] dispensed fate reasonably by means of his jars, his scales, and his envoys. He was not, however, all-powerful in the matter of the dispensation of fate. He could not, for instance, keep death away from his mortal son, Sarpedon; he could only postpone it. Zeus and the Olympians could not overcome
the order in nature—the supreme law—to which the
 gods and men were subject, just as men could not
 escape their moira, their appointed lot in life. ¹

Michalopoulos expresses the typical critical theories regarding the role
of fate in the Iliad: (1) fate is the order of nature to which both gods
and men are subject, and (2) fate is the numbered days of man's short
life. The former view is evident in the following citation from Cedric
Whitman's work:

If Homer says often that the gods are better and
stronger than men, and that no one can overreach the
will of Zeus, he does not mean that the government of
the universe lies at the whimsical beck of exalted demons.
The superiority of the gods lies in the absoluteness of
their being, which, since it is free of time, immortalizes
the processes and actions of the world, and necessitates
their final results before they take place. This is the
'fate' to which the gods are bound; Zeus himself represents
it more broadly than the others, whose functions are con-
ceived in connection with a single character's efforts, or
with the circumstances and events of a limited time or
place.

Both Michalopoulos and Whitman are forcing a concept of fate on
Homer's poem that is more consistently suited to a modern theory,
but which is only partly true in regard to Homer's conception. Certainly
when Zeus promises Thetis to work things out according to her desires,
he establishes a plan (of course, it is also Homer's plan for the poem)


toward the fulfilling of which he will continually manipulate the individual actions of the poem. Zeus is in control of the order of nature, the processes and actions of the world, in the Iliad. He goes along with the order of things because things are happening according to his promise anyway.

Moreover, C. M. Bowra acknowledges the fact that usually fate is the instrument of Zeus; he also includes the idea that sometimes Zeus is the victim of fate. Bowra explains that the notion of the fate to which Zeus is subject is concerned mainly with death.

The gods can alter most things, but this [man's death] they cannot alter, and therefore it stands apart from their activities and seems to be above them. It is true that this notion contradicts the belief that death comes from Zeus, for clearly in these cases it is outside his control. The contradiction is there, but it is quite intelligible. That Zeus sends death was the natural conclusion of a theology which was struggling to ascribe everything to divine management, but such a conclusion could not quite defeat the deeply established notion that man's days were numbered and nothing could add to them. It was only natural that in a time of changing opinions Homer should accept both views and use them differently for his dramatic purposes. The artistic gain is obvious. The pity of Hektor's death is the more pitiful because not even Zeus can avert it. He is the victim of powers which even the gods themselves cannot control.

Bowra's theory is more nearly compatible with the theory espoused in the introduction to this study. That this particular delineation of fate

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to which the gods are subject in the Iliad makes more sense than other theories can be further explicated through a direct criticism of Michalopoulos' theory.

In Part III, "The Drama of Man in Conflict with Fate," of a chapter called "The Triple Tragedy of the Iliad," Michalopoulos writes concerning the role of fate in the epic. He says that Moira means "a man's apportioned lot on earth from the day of his birth to the moment of his death. It includes all the good things and all the evil that may come to him. The sense of predestination is included." This is lucid enough. Yet, Michalopoulos confuses the issue when he writes, "While the line of demarcation between the jurisdiction of Zeus and that of Fate (Moira, Aisa) is often shadowy and while we sometimes find the expression Dios aisa (the fate of Zeus) employed, yet on the whole man's destiny in the Iliad is controlled by Moira against which even the gods have no final power. Thus, for example, it was possible for Zeus briefly to postpone Sarpedon's fate, but not to avert it." Here, Michalopoulos says, in effect, "man's destiny is controlled by his destiny." Shades of Gertrude Stein! Also, there is more confusion in the clause "it was possible for Zeus briefly to postpone

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4 Michalopoulos, Homer, p. 116.
5 Ibid., p. 117.
Sarpedon's fate, but not to avert [his fate]; for Michalopoulos is not using fate here to mean all that happens to a man from his birth to his death, but to mean simply—death. Now the ambiguity and the tautological nature of the critic's argument is not in him alone, but also in Homer. One can suggest a thesis that goes a long way toward unravelling the ambiguity surrounding Homer's and some of his critics' use of the words meaning fate. Already the solution has been alluded to in the first chapter of this study and in the preceding quotation from Bowra.

First, one must insist that Homer witnessed other men's erratic behavior in their response to the unknown in their lives, and he felt personal misgivings about the nature of his own life. To put it succinctly, Homer took the typically human view that every poet takes. He, like all reflective men, knew that man's plans, no matter how well calculated, were periodically thwarted. He saw that developing events has an apparently unexplainable way of suddenly changing directions. Thus, Homer assigned the unaccountable to fate, or the gods; in this sense, fate was the catch-all of Homer's own uncertainty about life. Fate, used therefore to explain the unaccountable, was Homer's and his heroes' serpent in the Garden of Eden. Man, not wanting to accept responsibility for something obviously outside his control, called such a happening fate. Homer called it fate. Over this Homer firmly established the will of Zeus.
Second, one sees that Homer, as well as some of his critics, used fate and destiny to denote 'death.' Homer, like all men, saw the transitoriness of man's life. He saw that all things wither and die. Mystified, and possibly but not necessarily bitter, Homer attempted to come to terms with life's eschatological truth by creating a poem in which much of the emotional impact and seriousness of the action revolves around man's mortality. Turning points in the epic come at the deaths of Patroklos and Hektor. Achilles' death, though only foreshadowed, is a controlling facet in the development of his personality in the poem. Perhaps Homer's wrestling with the problem of death was his effort to create some understanding of life--life so determined by ultimate loss--in order to enhance his and his audience's particular existences. For one who is afraid to die is, in the context of the Iliad, unable to live. When Hektor and Helen chide Paris for not fighting in the war, the implication of their chiding is that Paris' life is relevant only to the extent that he is willing to risk himself. (Of course, there is considerable doubt that Homer thought war to be necessary for man's confronting the implications of his death; he, in fact, faced the implication of his own death quite well by composing an epic.) Achilles and Agamemnon, too, pose the questions of whether or not they must face their deaths in order to live relevantly; they both think of their own imminent deaths as wastes of life. Thus, Homer implies that the
significance of man's life can be realized only if he is willing to live boldly in the face of the anxieties of destruction that living necessarily creates for man.

And yet, the gods were automatically free from the anxieties men suffered about death; the gods were immortal. Notwithstanding their immortality, however, Homer binds his gods by making them powerless in regard to man's death. The gods have no power to rescue any individual hero from his death (aisa, moros). This subjection of the gods to fate, meaning man's death, functions as a method by which Homer can explain death without implicating the gods in such a way that man could blame the gods for not saving them from ultimate disaster. This binding of the gods also, however, makes their antics take on a seriousness that is missed by some critics. The gods' hilarity can be interpreted as being like people's laughter in a horror movie—as an uncomfortable and uneasy expression of helplessness brought on by one's seeing something terrifying happening to someone else, something he would like to stop, but over which he has no real control. Thus must the gods laugh and play.

Therefore, Homer uses fate ambiguously. Sometimes it means happenings which are inscrutable to men, but which the gods and the poet understand because of their vantage point which enables them to see the whole. Other times it simply means death whose power is outside the control of the gods, the poet, and the heroes. Consequently, the gods of
Homer are subject to fate only when fate is used to mean man's death. Once one understands the ambiguous use of fate in the Iliad, he can read the poem with greater acumen and avoid in his own mind, at least, succumbing to a more recently developed view of predestination or determinism as a key to unlocking the secrets of Homer. Homer's presentation of fate is based on a less easily explained concept of human freedom than deterministic views traditionally imply.

Death, then, is a governing theme in the Iliad. The gods cannot keep it away from their favorites. The men live under the anxieties created by it. Once Achilles says to the emissaries from Agamemnon,

"Of possessions cattle and fat sheep are things to be had for the lifting, and tripods can be won, and the tawny high heads of horses, but a man's life cannot come back again, it cannot be lifted nor captured again by force, once it has crossed the teeth's barrier. 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."

(IX, 405-415)

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6 Homer, The Iliad of Homer, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1951), p. 209. All subsequent citations from the Iliad unless otherwise noted are from this edition and will be designated by book number and line number immediately following each quotation.
These words show that Achilles is grappling with the question of his death. He is trying to determine the why of his life, wanting desperately to reach a satisfactory solution to this ultimate problem. Just a moment before, he had said,

"Fate is the same for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard.
We are all held in a single honour, the brave with the weaklings;
A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much."

(IX, 318-320)

In these lines is a familiar resignation. Who, in losing his innocence and discovering his transience, has not felt the weight of Achilles' observation? Who has not wondered if all choices were not, in fact, equally empty? Achilles' bitterness toward Agamemnon has turned into bitterness and bewilderment toward the brevity of life.

An interesting parallel can be made at this point between the Iliad and Job. Both poems concern the bitterness that develops out of man's losses. Achilles loses Briseis and resigns from the war. Job loses his family and possessions; he too, becomes passive, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. Both, then, contemplate the meaning of ultimate loss, their own lives, and conclude that if life is to be ultimately defeated it

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can hold little meaning. Achilles surmises that one had just as well leave the fighting; Job believes that one just as well die. Further analogies between the two can be drawn.

The emissaries from Agamemnon parallel the comforters of Job. Phoinix, Odysseus, and Ajax try to manipulate Achilles back into the war by telling him that he should forgive Agamemnon, who is now sorry for having offended Achilles. Phoinix even calls upon tradition for support of his argument to Achilles; Phoinix cites the episode concerning Meleagros, who was persuaded from his anger to defend the Aitolians when the Kouretes were about to swamp them. Phoinix is saying that there is precedence for changing from anger to forgiveness; therefore, were Achilles to join the fight, he could still save face.

Ajax berates Achilles by describing him to Odysseus and Phoinix in this manner,

He is hard, and does not remember that friend's affection wherein we honoured him by the ships, far beyond all others. Pitiless. And yet a man takes from his brother's slayer the blood price, or the price for a child who was killed, and the guilty one, when he has largely repaid, stays still in the country, and the injured man's heart is curbed, and his pride, and his anger when he has taken the price; but the gods put in your breast a spirit not to be placated, bad, for the sake of one single girl.

(IX, 630-638)
More rhetoric to convince Achilles of his wrong. However, the emissaries are arguing from the standpoint that Agamemnon's insult is still the chief cause of Achilles' bitterness. They do not comprehend that his anger has taken as a greater object the ultimate loss implied in death. This is the same misunderstanding that Job's comforters pleaded under.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar tell Job that to be angry at God over his losses is wrong. They say that a man is not to question God. Tradition dictates that the man who loses what he owns has wronged God. But Job is not asking the question of institutional religion or conventional wisdom, the question of why he lost his properties. He has come to face his own death, and consequently man's death in general. Over and over he tells his comforters that they should be identifying with him in his despair for they, too, are subject to a neutral fate. Whether or not they do what men or social consciousness expects of them, all men die. Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz, Odysseus, Phoinix, and Ajax are acting out of an innocence, out of a trust in the arbitrary values of men. Job and Achilles have stripped away the shell of life and found the remainder wanting.

For all that, there is a difference between Job and Achilles. Job is bitter toward God for man's death; Achilles is simply bitter toward death. Achilles' bitterness lacks an object in a way that Job's does not.
Therefore, the poet of *Job* is working toward a different conclusion than the poet of the *Iliad*. As one would expect, this difference has a dramatic effect on the endings of the poems and therefore on the poets' understandings of life. On the one hand, God confronts Job, charging him with the responsibility of his bitterness. The words of God sound like the words of the comforters; their greater authority seems to lie in the fact of their being spoken by a cosmic voice. It appears that the poet of *Job* assigns death to nature, the-way-things-are, and man's futility over death is resolved by his blind acceptance of that nature. On the other hand, Homer's gods maintain a kind of weakness in regard to man's death lacking in the God of *Job*. Achilles' bitterness is alleviated in the particular death of his companion, Patroklos. Achilles' feelings return as he sees in Patroklos' demise his own failure to maintain his integrity. He sees that his investment in himself is contingent on his investment in his friends. Life without Patroklos, and consequently without the rest of the people with whom he was involved, is shallow and empty. He does have feelings; he does not live in a vacuum. In other words, Homer asserts again his idea that life is only possible through risk. Life without risk is not worthy of anyone's time, either the gods' or Achilles'. Of course, Achilles reacts for a while in a blind rage; it is not until old Priam comes for Hektor's body that Achilles obtains his full humanity and once again acts within the context
of all his feelings. Nevertheless, it is the death of his friend, a significant and singular act, that in a sense returns him to himself. From this one sees the different solution to the problem of man's death that Homer advances as opposed to the solution advanced by the poet of Job. Homer particularizes his solution while the Jobean poet generalizes his. Homer's is the bolder and the stronger solution. It is riskier.

From the cursory comparison of two poems whose subjects are similar, one gets an idea of Homer's emphasis in the Iliad. One sees that Homer shared an interest with all men both ancient and modern in the problem of the meaning of life that is bound in time and space. Homer refused to implicate cosmic forces in that problem, but used his gods, instead, to strengthen his idea that life is made by its living. One appropriates living to the fullest by taking risks, by acting as if one would never die while at the same time knowing that death is always imminent. Homer characterizes this tension in Achilles. The other heroes and the gods are backdrops for this tension. They are also alternate modes of expressing and illuminating the tension.
CHAPTER V

THE HUMAN MOTIVATION OF THE ILLIAD

The introduction to this study described it as the voice of an Axylus, a very minor person in the Iliad. John Scott once said that "Axylus is described as 'a man who lived in a house by the side of the road and gave hospitality to all.'" Certainly, the disparate theories of the critics have found hospitality here. The various uses of the gods in the Iliad, itself, show Homer to have been hospitable in this respect. Homer did use the gods in multifarious ways. It is no misnomer to call the gods of the Iliad asymmetrical. Homer's uses of them are based in his vision of life.

Homer saw life as complex and contradictory. Unlike the writers of medieval romance, for instance, Homer refused to gloss over any of the paradoxes he saw. He met the vagaries of life, gave them the asymmetrical form they had in life, in his poem, and left generations of readers puzzling over his presentation. The complicated view of life which was the wellspring for Homer's view of the gods is the mature view. Homer was a mature poet who accepted the multiplicity of

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1 John Scott, Homer and His Influence (New York, 1931), p. 44.
existence and rejected rigid absolutism. That the motivation for the Iliad was essentially human, i.e., that it grew out of Homer's vision of the complexity of human life, finds general support from critics of both Homer and Greek literature in general.

In the statement, "Into the story of Achilles' anger the poet has woven most of the great human emotions and has endowed all his actors with an individuality that has never been surpassed," John Scott acknowledges that Homer's complicated view grew out of his familiarity with human personality. More specific than Scott's statement is this one by C. M. Bowra: "The gods are all members of one family, they live together on Olympus, they submit, not always easily, to the rule of Zeus, they are all in the likeness of men." The point is that Homer's gods are characterized by Homer's view of man. Bowra says a few pages later that "Homer's anthropomorphism is remarkable in that it has no known roots and left few results on the popular worship of Greece. It grew up in the unique conditions of Ionia, and it only survived where the epic survived and affected the literature and life of the Greek world."

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3 Scott, *Homer and His Influence*, p. 44.


5 Ibid., p. 219.
In other words, Homer composed at a time when several religious traditions merging together created a situation that allowed Homer to create his own unique conception of providence. He took the gods of several merged religions and created them in the likeness of the men with whom he lived. Because all the gods he used were generally acceptable but not emotionally restrictive to his audiences, he could do with them what he liked.

Powys supports the idea that Homer's conception of the gods has no moral overtones when he writes:

How interesting it is that the peculiar shiver of terrified awe which our great religious prophets and teachers and preachers and saints have, by degrees, ever since the year one of our calendar, forced us to associate with the word God, doesn't enter for a moment into Homer's conception of Zeus, any more than it does into Virgil's conception of Jupiter or Jove. How satisfactory it is to be able to worship Zeus or his daughter Pallos Athene or his sister-wife Hera, without having to think of a God that we have been taught for nearly two thousand years to associate with the "bowing and scraping" of a Hush-a-bye Heaven and the infernal cruelties of a diabolical Spanish Inquisition Hell, not to speak of the Predestination doctrines of Knox and Calvin and the fiery stakes of Bloody Mary.  

One gets the idea from Powys' statement, too, that Homer's depiction of the gods was rooted in his conception of man. Any abstract absolutism is missing from Homer's gods because they have human emotions, and

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not one of them is actually in control of the others. Each god always has the very real option to rebel against Zeus, and they do have Zeus stick generally to what the entire society of gods wants him to do. In other words, Homer's gods are in relationship to others, and they are, on occasion, compromised in like manner to Homer's men. Thus, Homer's mode of viewing the gods grows out of his projecting a view of human existence onto the gods.

One can cite still more evidence that the motivation for the Iliad is mainly human. Carpenter says, "Apart from the supernatural appurtenances of its central character Achilles, folk tale has left little trace on the carefully humanized drama of the Iliad." Gilbert Murray is more specific; he says,

Now let us be clear about one point. You will sometimes find writers who ought to know better expressing themselves about these matters in a misleading way. They say, or imply, that when a Greek spared an enemy he did not do it from mercifulness or honour as we understand the words, but because it was a part of his religion that Zeus would have a grudge against him and punish him if he did otherwise. This may be true of a given superstitious individual. But as regards the race it is putting the effect for the cause. It was the emotion of the race that first created the religious belief. If the early Greeks believed that Zeus hated the man who wronged a suppliant, that belief was not based on any observed behavior on the part of Zeus. It was merely that they themselves hated the man who did so, and felt that their god must hate him.

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Thus do the critics explain that Homer's view derives from his perception of human life. Bowra, who is the most consistent spokesman for the Iliad's being humanly motivated, says, "If Hebrew literature ultimately refers its standards to God, Greek refers to man. Man provided the starting-point for every form of Greek writing, just as the human body provided the main subject for Greek sculpture. . . . The Greeks were the founders of humanism because their chief interest lay in man." This citation supports the view of the last chapter which drew a contrast between the Jobean poet and Homer.

Hence, one can generalize along with several authorities that the controlling viewpoint for Homer was his conception of man. As has been persistently noted in this study, that conception was complex. W. B. Stanford, in describing Homer's presentations of Odysseus in the Odyssey, argues in the same vein as this study concerning Homer's view of man.

Homer was large-minded enough to comprehend a unity in apparent diversity, a structural consistency within an external changefulness, in the character of Ulysses. But few later authors were as comprehending. Instead, in the post-Homeric tradition, Odysseus' complex personality becomes broken up into various simple types—the politico, the romantic amorist, the sophisticated villain, the sensualist, the philosophic traveler, and others. Not till James Joyce wrote his Ulysses was a successful effort made to recreate Homer's polytropic hero in full.

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Similarly after Homer's judgments on Odysseus' ethical status became narrower and sharper, Moralists grew angry in disputing whether he was a "good" man or not--good, that is to say, according to the varying principles of Athens, or Alexandria, or Rome, or Florence, or Versailles, or Madrid, or Weimar. Here is another long Odyssey for Odysseus to endure. But Homer, the unmoved mover in the chaotic cosmos of tradition, does not vex his own or his hero's mind with any such problems in split personality or ambivalent ethics. He is content to portray a man of many turns.

Stanford believes that Odysseus' motives arise out of egotism: his crew is needed to sail his ship home; his piety he preserves in order to keep on good terms with his gods. A monolithic morality, one based on an appeal outside human emotions, is post-Homeric.

As has been noted, Homer looked at life with a minimum of traditional trappings or demands. When he came to portraying the gods in the *Iliad*, he did it straight out of his understanding of life. To Homer, man's feelings are not monolithic; on the contrary, they are kaleidoscopic. They are intricate, complicated, sometimes irrational, and somewhat overwhelming. This conception of man is everywhere intrinsic to the *Iliad*.

Always the strength of Homer is that he adopts no strict philosophical system; he avoids institutional, provincial, or parochial

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11 Ibid., p. 137.
approaches that might water his thought into weakness. At the same time provincial and moralistic views find their way into the mouths of Homeric heroes and gods. Homer, however, refuses to subscribe to any particular, narrow theory. His interest is not to synthesize or explain the full spectrum of what he knows. Nevertheless, his poem does provide the material for critics who try to explain Homer according to specific concepts of his thought. Moreover, one can conclude that the polytheism of the poem was particularly helpful to Homer's lack of subscription to any singular view. Lacking a culture where a single god held sway certainly provided Homer with a prefabricated climate in which he would not be obligated to make everything he thought about or saw in man fit some monolithic mold. Homer's view of life is the complex, multiple, asymmetrical view. So are his view and uses of the gods.
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