

Student Name

ENG/HUM 2543

Kelli McBride

18 August 2009

Homer's *Iliad*

Homer's *Iliad* is about the invasion of Troy by Greece because of Agamemnon's greed, though he hides behind the abduction of Helen as an excuse. In the last 200 years, we have witnessed many similar moments, such as the events leading up to WWI and WWII when Germany invaded Poland and Czechoslovakia. Recently, we have witnessed Russia invade Georgia, and the threat of another major war looms over us. Just as the characters in this epic, some people today see war as an opportunity for glory, wealth, and power and do not care about the loss of life and destruction that accompanies such aggression. George Santayana said, in 1905, that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Though the *Iliad* is literary fiction (though it may be based on a real war), we can learn much from the lessons of this war and the decimation of family and friends all for greed and pride.

In this epic, we see the Ancient Greek value placed on honor and glory in battle. The Achaeans remind me a lot of the Klingons – everything revolves around personal honor, and that honor is gained in great part by military prowess. It also means that pride is a huge part of the male psyche – if one's pride is wounded, then it is a slight that has to be avenged. So we see Agamemnon and Achilles behaving like spoiled bullies at the beginning and costing the lives of hundreds just because they feel their honor slighted. Achilles, as the main hero, takes a journey through despair, triumph, loss, and finally a realization of a larger truth. He begins looking for the glory he only thinks can come from war, and he eagerly enters battle; however, at the end, he

realizes that war is not only about glory. It also brings loss and anguish that no amount of glory can appease. In the scene with Priam in Achilles' tent, we see the two men grieve for what they've lost, we see a moment of connection between these bitter enemies, and though they have both found honor and glory many times on the battlefield in the past, both have lost so much in this war that they finally see the full picture of war. That doesn't mean they are anti-war, but it does indicate a more complete understanding and perhaps, had they lived beyond the Trojan War, they would have been less eager to fight first rather than find other means to resolve conflict.

The genre here is epic. It is a reflection of the Ancient Greek values of honor, excellence, and reverence for the gods. It shows the importance placed on bonds of friendship and oaths of loyalty. The opening uses the invocation to the muse, it states the theme of the epic (the rage of Achilles), and we see epithets ("brilliant Achilles"), patronymics ("Apollo son of Leto"), and the use of superhuman heroes (Achilles is part god and has special skills that make him the best warrior).