PROLOGUE: HOMER'S *ILIAD*

Homer's *Iliad* remains a work of peculiar and unique interest because it is the oldest surviving example of a long complete piece of narrative fiction in our literary tradition; and still completely accessible to us after two and a half millennia. It is fascinating to discover that Homer does not, as we might have expected, merely 'tell a story', transmit an account of events; he presents a discourse, a set of codes displayed with (for us) the pride and excitement of novelty as well as (for him) the strength and confidence bestowed by an already rich tradition. The Muses, the descriptive epithets, the whole stylistic apparatus we were once excited to discover to have depended on an oral narrative technique, may now excite us for other and quite different reasons. The oral excitement generated by Parry has worn off, but we are only now beginning to think how to read the text as a piece of narrative.

To take two examples: the phrase 'Priam and the people of Priam of the good ash spear' denotes the entire nation of Troy but is used only in the context of the inevitable doom being prophesied for the city, so that we realise that the good ash spear is in fact not going to be good enough (no more destiny-proof than Wotan's), and that the formulaic phrase operates as a signifier to which readers will respond as to dramatic irony. Again, it has sometimes been said that these adjectives are primarily there for metrical and syntactical convenience, so that (for instance) Achilles is called swift-footed when he is not moving (1.489), 'but that could mark the contrast between his normal state and his present inactivity'.[1] Since most people read the poem in English, the metrical

[1] C. M. Bowra, *Homer* (London 1972) 24.

reason for a particular choice of descriptive phrase is the least interesting thing about it: and in any case, so rich is Homer's repertoire, there are some alternatives which are metrically identical. After reading a few hundred lines, we are aware that Homer is presenting a hero with a number of recurrent and insisted-on qualities and characteristics. The value of the accumulations, choices and repetitions lies in the gradual build-up the reader makes, and not in any individual isolated metrical phoneme.

If reading the *Iliad* poses problems different from those encountered when reading *War and Peace*, can these problems be identified, and if so can they be solved? Or is their uniqueness and their insolubility the essential mystery of the *Iliad* which persists long after the excitement generated by Parry and Wolf has worn off?

> Who was it wrote the *Iliad*? What a laugh!
> Why Homer, all the world knows. Of his life
> Doubtless some facts exist. It's everywhere.
> We have not settled, though, his date of birth.
> Until . . . 'What's this, the Germans say is fact
> That Wolf found out first? It's unpleasant work,
> Their chop and change, unsettling one's belief.
> All the same, while we live, we learn, that's sure.'
> . . . And after Wolf, a dozen of his like
> Proved there was never any Troy at all,
> Neither besiegers nor besieged. Nay, worse,
> No actual Homer, no authentic text,
> No warrant for the fiction I as fact
> Had treasured in my heart and soul so long,
> Ay mark you, and as fact held still, still hold,
> Spite of new knowledge, in my heart of hearts
> And soul of souls, fact's essence freed and fixed.

For Browning,[2] modern in this as in so many of his insights,

[2] Browning, *Development* (included first in his late collection *Asolando: Facts and Fancies*).

the 'authentic text' of Homer's *Iliad* remained inviolate and unassailable, for it belongs to the reader.

One might posit an innocent or first-time reader of the *Iliad* who had never heard of Zeus or Troy. This seems more likely, though perhaps not much more likely, than a reader of *War and Peace* who had never heard of Napoleon and the retreat from Moscow. Or one might have 'heard of' Troy or Moscow, Zeus or Napoleon, and still not be sure of their place in these particular narratives. Napoleon is as much a character in *War and Peace* as Prince Andrew, and Tolstoi presents him in exactly the same way, as we can see in book x; before the battle for the Shevardino redoubt Napoleon sees the war as a game: afterwards he could not cope with the terrible spectacle of the battlefield of the dead until he could rationalise it as his doing, his will. Napoleon, riding over the battlefield, rationalising the war, is part of the same narrative discourse which has just isolated the wounding of Prince Andrew, presented in Homeric fashion with two epic similes;[3] and beyond all this, the author as the retrospective total consciousness of the historical process offers the reader a remoter perspective in which the great commanders appear as pawns of destiny.

In the *Iliad* the Olympian deities, of which the naive or first-time reader may have heard, are so real to the heroes that they speak to them and see them and even wound them. Yet behind even Zeus's view of the battle, as he sits apart, Homer himself presents a display of events of which Zeus too is only part.

The *Iliad* is the narrative of a siege in which the Achaians (Greeks) are the attackers and ultimate victors, the Trojans the defenders and ultimate losers. But the narrative begins by saying nothing of ultimate victory for the Achaians.

> Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilles
> and its devastation, which put pain thousandfold
> upon the Achaians,

[3] 'Like a bird whirring in rapid flight and alighting on the ground, a shell dropped with little noise . . . the smoking shell spun like a top between him and the prostrate adjutant . . .' (*War and Peace* x.xxxvi).

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 Achilles.

The poet announces that he will treat of the anger of Achilles, and that this wrought havoc upon his own side: the surprise word for the naive reader is 'Achaians'. The narrative gradually emerges, as background and hereafter are filled in, though there is always a single temporality and no flashbacks as such, until we are aware of a time 'before the wrath' as well as after it. What emerges as our text is a self-contained tale which is also part of a missing larger tale which we don't have but can construct in a sketchy outline quite different in texture from the immensely packed, detailed story Homer himself gives us. The excitement and mysteriousness which continues to attend readings of the *Iliad* – and not just first-time readings, which may indeed be poorer in those qualities because the reader does not yet know how to place what he can read in the context of what he cannot read, but all readings – is due largely to our sense that what is displayed includes fragments of and references to a missing text, which is both essential and at the same time superfluous. This missing tale confers on the told tale, the tale of Achilles' anger, the actual text, a larger and grander significance which the reader finds access to, saying in effect 'this wrath might seem trivial were it not part of a larger structure'. Achilles' anger is a stratagem whereby Homer can turn Achilles into the star of his narrative, which has a very large cast of characters, many of whom are really part of the missing Troy tale.

There is thus an ambiguity at the very outset of any confrontation with the *Iliad*: an ambiguity codified in the

simple and obvious fact that the title of the poem and its opening are at variance. The old analysts solved this problem by saying that there were really two, or several, poems, behind the monumental *Iliad*. Yet there is only one text, the monumental *Iliad* itself, substantially, to the best of our knowledge, the text that Virgil read; and the challenge of this text to the modern reader is that he must try to make sense of it (not that it does not already 'make sense') by the act of reading it. This is difficult for any long work, which tends to become fragmented in our consciousness until we have read it many times (more times than most readers of the poem will probably ever read it). Eventually we shall impose on our reading of that opening invocation our sense of how the poem will end and of all that has to happen for that ending to occur. Any first 'naive' reading of the text must be unique. Reading in progress and retrospective reading (that is, awareness as we read of what we have not yet read this time) are very different activities.[4] Once you know the end, on any subsequent reading, however fragmented, however much you choose to isolate specific passages for various purposes (sheer pleasure, critical complexity, 'crucialness' to the story) you will be imposing a retrospective sense of the whole work which could not have entered your mind when you were first reading it, and which, now, any passage you choose to isolate can be made to – indeed will be bound to – illustrate and confirm.

'Who then among the gods set Achilles and Agamemnon at strife?' asks the narrator, with the air of one presenting a mystery and a surprise, the hidden cause, at once to be revealed, for his grand narrative effect. Apollo is angry at the dishonouring of his priest, whose daughter Chryseis Agamemnon has carried off from an earlier siege: the first 'piece of pastness' in the narrative. In narrative, effect frequently precedes cause, in that we encounter it first: a clear example of the mimetic effect. Lewis Carroll was making a serious point about narrative when the White Queen pricked

[4] Cf. H. Ruthrof, *Reader's Construction* 75.

her finger. 'That accounts for the bleeding, you see. Now you understand the way things happen here.'

Agamemnon refused to return the priest's daughter, so Apollo sent a plague upon the Achaians, an intimation or foreshadowing of the disasters which the narrator has already announced will be the consequence of Achilles' anger. That anger has not yet erupted. It does so now. Achilles seems to provoke a confrontation with Agamemnon when he summons an assembly on the tenth day of the pestilence and wonders aloud at the cause of the god's displeasure The reader knows this already, so that a kind of irony is operating: 'Come let us enquire of some soothsayer who should tell us why Apollo is angry.' Agamemnon says nothing. The whole of this opening is a stratagem by which the narrator brings into existence the wrath promised in the opening line.

The soothsayer demands protection before he speaks. 'For I shall provoke one who rules all the Argives and whom the Achaians obey.' The reader is now waiting for the narrative to catch him up. He can relax; he is already ahead. Achilles speaks again provocatively, bringing the inevitable wrath promised by the narrator nearer. 'No man while I live shall lay violent hands upon you, not even if you mean Agamemnon . . .'

Effect precedes cause. Behind the events narrated there lies a cause for the reader to elicit. Why did Achilles deliberately provoke Agamemnon? So that Achilles would be angry and make good the narrator's proclaimed theme: and for that to work psychologically, Achilles must be a certain kind of character, touchy, jealous of Agamemnon, while aware, as the reader has got to become, that he himself is the better soldier.

When Achilles is obliged by Agamemnon to surrender Briseis as a replacement for Chryseis he loses face. His mother Thetis pleads to Zeus for recompense for her son. Zeus promises a run of Trojan victories until the Achaians 'do Achilles honour and exalt him with recompense'. Homer invents a debt owed by Zeus to Thetis in order to manipulate the narrative; again he creates a cause for an effect already pre-empted as necessary: exactly as the episode of Chryseis

and the subsequent taking by Agamemnon of Briseis creates a cause for the effect already pre-empted by the narrator as essential to his story: namely the wrath theme itself. Now the story requires a run of Trojan victories led by Hector, culminating in the death of Patroclus during the absence of his friend Achilles from the battlefield. Since the death of Patroclus and the subsequent death of Hector at the hand of Achilles, now returned to the fight, are the climax of the *Iliad*, the narrator must create causes to explain how such events occur. The reader must not supply alternative explanations to those in the discourse itself. None of these events, and especially not the death of Patroclus wearing the armour of Achilles, in a sense masquerading as, mirroring, Achilles himself, could occur without Achilles' absence. So absent he must be: therefore angry; therefore dishonoured. Thus we work back to a situation in which so great a hero can be dishonoured: we work back to the beginning.

Is Zeus's interference to be understood as the cause of the Trojan victories? Would Achilles' absence by itself have been insufficient cause? After nine years in which so many of the principal heroes are still alive an indecisive pattern of swaying fortunes must have obtained. Are events which we think of as brought about by various combinations of management and chance, equally well presented in a narrative as the products of a kind of divine fiddling with human affairs? Such questions are asked frequently by narrators of later fictions, and especially by Tolstoi in *War and Peace*; he will not let the great leaders have credit or discredit for events which they suppose to have been brought about by their wills, but which the narrator, in his role as the total consciousness of history, sees as the working out of historical necessity.

The *Iliad* is a tragic poem. The run of Trojan victories is cruelly delusive not only in terms of a story in which Hector is doomed to die (the fear so touchingly faced by Andromache in the scene of their parting in book VI), but in terms also of the larger, missing yet omnipresent story of the destruction of Troy itself, of which Hector is the presented symbol. Achilles

loses his shield when Patroclus dies and his body is stripped of his friend's armour but his shield is replaced by divine intervention. When Hector dies Troy loses its irreplaceable shield.

The fall of Troy is continually put into the reader's mind by Homer through the words of Hector and Agamemnon, who both say

> For I know well this thing in my heart and mind:
> The day will come when holy Ilium shall be destroyed
> and Priam and the people of Priam of the good ash spear.[5]

That recurrent phrase, to which I have already drawn attention, is used also by Zeus in a quarrel with Hera in book IV. Zeus wishes that the war might end with the return of Helen and the sparing of Troy. Hera bursts out in angry protest. Zeus asks her what the Trojans have done to her to make her hate them so.

> For of all the cities beneath the sun and starry heaven
> dwelt in by men who live on the earth,
> dear to my heart was holy Ilium
> and Priam and the people of Priam of the good ash spear.[6]

Again, those words must be decoded in terms of the ultimate fall of the Trojans despite the success of their present counter-attack.

Zeus reluctantly assents to the city's doom, but warns Hera: 'Don't try to stop me when I wish to destroy another city.' Hera replies that Argos, Sparta and Mycenae are dearest to her heart. Zeus may destroy them whenever they are hateful to him. Here we are carried forward beyond even Troy's fall to the destruction of Mycenae itself, Agamemnon's citadel.

[5] *Iliad* 4.163–5, 6.447–9. [6] *Iliad* 4.44–7.

proudest and richest creation of bronze age civilisation. Thus history casts a long proleptic shadow over the brief moment of Achilles' wrath and its consequences, to the point where the reader, for all his wonder at the magnificent age of heroes, may almost see them with the retrospective eye of Tolstoi, as strutting dinosaurs. If they behaved like this, no wonder they and their culture fell, and this may become part of our own reading of the *Iliad*.

The capriciousness and collective instability of divine motivation and divine interference form a *donnée* of the narrative of the *Iliad*. What might be expected to emerge for the reader is a sense of randomness, yet the narrator operates a total consciousness of how things are a control of events both before the *Iliad* and beyond it, which has the effect of subsuming randomness within inevitability. The will of Zeus, least unstable element in the divine order is that which is accomplished, and is not that which is not accomplished: hence the narrator's opening promise about the anger of Achilles

> and its devastation which put pains thousandfold
> upon the Achaians
> . . . and the will of Zeus was accomplished

The correlative of the will of Zeus is the ordered, coherent and logical narrative of the *Iliad*, a poem containing, and contained by, history

Reading the *Iliad*, reading *War and Peace*, the reader senses the ultimate powerlessness of great heroes and at the same time their belief in their own power to control events.

The presented world of the *Iliad* is one in which chance is never the reason for anything, yet might be deduced as the reason for everything. The gods nullify, or render superfluous, the concept of chance yet the patterns of causality their presence in the narrative creates may be seen as random in that what determines them is Homer's own unpredictable narrative. If he wants a god, he puts one there, as he does at the deaths of Patroclus (Apollo) and Hector (Athene). If he does

not want a god there, he removes them, as in the final confrontation between Achilles and Priam when Hermes, having escorted Priam to Achilles' tent, says he will leave 'for it would anger others for immortal gods to be entertained face to face by mortals'. The problem of getting rid of Hermes is a problem of narrative not of theology.[7] Tolstoi says of chance that it only denotes a certain stage in understanding phenomena. The author of the *Iliad* has constructed a discourse in which the concept of chance is not required for the reader to understand what he reads.

The effect of reading the *Iliad* is a sense that time stands still, that the fighting seems always to have been going on, yet in the total consciousness of the narrator there is a before and an after. Thus at the opening of *Iliad* XII we are told that

> when in the tenth year the city of Priam was taken
> and the Argives gone in their ships to the beloved
> land of their fathers,
> then at last Poseidon and Apollo took counsel
> to wreck the wall, letting loose the strength of rivers
> upon it . . . and Zeus rained
> incessantly, to break the wall faster and wash it
> seaward.
> . . .
> Thus, afterwards, Poseidon and Apollo were
> minded
> to put things in place, but at this time battle and
> clamour were blazing

and the reader returns to the 'meanwhile' of the presented world of the narrative, in which these things have not yet taken their due place in the chain of temporality. 'Troy has fallen' and 'Troy has not yet fallen' are both in their different modes simultaneously true. Thus, although the destruction of holy Ilion does not occur within the temporality of the chain of

[7] *Iliad* 24.463–4. Macleod's note ((ed.), *Homer: Iliad Book XXIV* (Cambridge 1982)) seems rather to miss the point. Gods do appear to men, albeit disguised, and show them favour, as Aphrodite does to Helen in *Iliad* III. There is no question but that Helen knows who she is.

events dependent on the wrath of Achilles, far from lying beyond Homer's imagining, it has in fact already, for Homer and his reader, taken place. *fuimus Troes, fuit Ilium et ingens gloria Teucrorum*[8] does not become true for the first time in *Aeneid* II. The legend that the gods deserted the doomed city, so powerfully evoked by Virgil,[9] could be deduced from the *Iliad* itself, even though we lack the *Iliou Persis* on which Virgil probably modelled his own account of the city's last hours.

Why was Troy doomed? The obvious answer is that Paris ran off with Helen, whose recovery is the ostensible motive and object of the campaign. Ferrucci, in his book *The Poetics of Disguise*, says that she represents the dream of happiness both sides pursue and neither can relinquish. For the Trojans, to give her back is unthinkable, and for the Greeks, not to get her back is unthinkable. Hence the abortive duel, in book III, between Paris and Menelaus. Far from being absurd, as the commentators often invite us to think, this duel is the narrative enactment of a focused stalemate, of equally balanced forces and wills. The war is past the stage when it could be settled by Helen's men alone; they take on here a symbolism which belongs to the missing Troy tale. So with another famous scene, the 'Teichoskopia', when Helen identifies the Greek leaders for Priam. Again, the commentators assume there is a problem here,[10] yet since the episode is admitted to be one of the most touching and effective in the poem, it must be the case that we read the passage with quite different narrative expectations from those of documentary realism, and that the sense we all of us make without difficulty of the passage has nothing to do with what is 'likely'. To quote Barthes's *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative*

> the imitation of life is a contingent quality; the function of the narrative is not to 'represent', it is to provide a display which is still an enigma to us but which can only be of a mimetic order. The 'reality' of a sequence does not lie in the 'natural' succession of the

[8] *Aeneid* 2.325–6. [9] *Aeneid* 2.601–33.

[10] But not M. M. Willcock, *Companion to the Iliad* (Chicago 1976) 39–40. There is a good discussion in G. S. Kirk, *Homer and the Oral Tradition* (Cambridge 1976) 81–5.

> actions of which it is composed, but in the logic which is revealed in it, is risked and satisfied.

In the same essay Barthes discusses the way narrative often tries to introduce devices which pretend to give it a 'natural' cause of existence: the epistolary device for instance, supposedly discovered manuscripts, films which start before the credits. 'Reluctance to display its codes is a mark of bourgeois society and the mass culture which has developed from it.' Helen on the walls of Troy, the abortive duel between Paris and Menelaus must be read in terms of the narrative code of the *Iliad*, which is extremely sophisticated and self-displaying. The effect of the scene on the wall as Homer presents it is quite different from the effect a 'flashback' would have had. This is happening now. It is a display of the Greek leaders, of Helen herself, of the author's narrative technique. It is really Helen, not the Greek leaders, who are on show. We see her as the old men see her, as Priam sees her, and later as Aphrodite and Paris see her. Our first sight of her was earlier in that third book, when she was alone, stitching her tapestry of war, and was led forth by Iris away from her quiet representation of war to take part in another representation for which the narrator required her presence. It is her war. And her most famous appearance in the *Iliad* shows her talking to Hector, in the presence of Paris, wishing she had died before these things happened 'but since the gods had brought it about that these bad things should be so, then I wish I could have been the bed-mate of a better man than this'. There follow the famous lines referring to herself and Paris as two

> on whom Zeus set a vile destiny so that hereafter
> we shall be made into things of song for the men
> of the future.[11]

Helen foresees the *Iliad*, which (of course) Homer imagines to be as yet unwritten.

Yet the true subject of the *Iliad* is not after all Helen, who appears in only three of its twenty-four books, but Achilles, whom we also see alone, 'singing of men's fame'.[12] What Helen foresees is the larger 'missing' Troy tale within which the *Iliad* as the tale of Achilles' wrath makes sense. Both Helen and Achilles are shown as self-conscious, self-aware, aware of their role in the narrative which they enact. Helen, herself inactive in the war, is a presenter of the war to Priam, a recorder of the war in pictures, a prophet of the *Iliad*. Achilles, during his own period of inaction, articulates action in the figure of the artist, the singer of heroic song. When he returns to the fight, and has killed Hector and agreed to give back his body and so to bring the tale and the discourse to their end, Achilles presents the parable of the two urns of Zeus and the good and evil he allots to men. The artist is also the philosopher; it is not merely men's fame and their deeds, good or bad, which shall form the song on the lips of men, but an attempt to understand will be part of the song and of the singer's function. From its beginning, narrative was seen by the narrator himself not only as record or chronicle, not only as presented world, but as discourse, speculative commentary. By the end of the *Iliad*, the reader too is ready to moralise on that presented world. We know how; we may still wonder why.

Both Helen and Achilles confront themselves and their roles. Achilles in particular is forced into self-confrontation by his awareness of an existential choice imposed on him by destiny: to choose a short glorious life and to die in Troy, or to return home to a safe but inglorious old age. When Achilles in his wrath withdraws from the fight he only withdraws to the ships, he does not, though he threatens to, leave Troy for good (and thus effect the second choice). When in book XXIV he voluntarily returns Hector's body, the mirror image of book I (when he refused to return Briseis) is typical of the poem's narrative structure, which reflects back on itself and reverses

[12] *Iliad* 9.189.

its own images. In the same way, Achilles' decision to withdraw (the war is futile) and his decision to return (the war is inevitable) reflecting on each other enact the poem. When Achilles confronts Hector in book XXII for the last duel, Hector is wearing Achilles' armour, stripped from Patroclus's body. Achilles confronts himself. Their last exchange emphasises the common destiny of death. If it be not now, yet it will come.

Helen regrets running away with Paris, Achilles regrets Patroclus's death, yet both felt they had free will when they performed their actions. Tolstoi in book IX ch. i of *War and Peace* (the famous passage which contains the statement that 'a king is history's slave') says

> Each man lives for himself, using his freedom to attain his personal aims, and feels with his whole being that he can now abstain from doing this or that action. But as soon as he has done it, that action performed at a certain moment in time becomes irrevocable and belongs to history, which has not a free but a predestined significance.

The action performed freely at a certain moment in time is the narrative of the *Iliad*. But the author of the *Iliad*, Homer, requires the reader to reflect on the presented world of the narrative and on the causes of events whose logic for the reader is that they are the narrative of the *Iliad*.

Let us consider how Homer presents the actions of Achilles in the *Iliad*. Patroclus's death shakes him profoundly. We are told by the narrator several times in XVIII that he is disturbed (*ochthesas*), greatly disturbed (*meg' ochthesas*), heavily sighing. Achilles moreover shows an awareness and self-consciousness about his own actions, for example in the great speech to his Myrmidons delivered 'groaning deeply' at 18.324–42.

> Ah me. It was an empty word I cast forth on that
>   day
> when in his halls I tried to comfort the hero
>   Menoitios.

I told him I would bring back his son in glory to
Opous
with Ilium sacked, and bringing his share of war
spoils allotted.
But Zeus does not bring to accomplishment all
thoughts in men's minds.
Thus it is destiny for us both to stain the same soil
here in Troy, since I shall never come home, and
my father
Peleus, the aged rider, will not welcome me in his
great house,
nor Thetis my mother, but in this place the earth
will receive me.
But seeing that it is I, Patroclus, who follow you
underground,
I will not bury you till I bring to this place the
armour
and the head of Hector, since he was your
great-hearted murderer.
Before your burning pyre I shall behead twelve
glorious
children of the Trojans for my anger over your
slaying.
Until then you shall lie where you are in front of
my curved ships
and beside you women of Troy and deep-girdled
Dardanian women
shall sorrow for you night and day and shed tears
for you, those whom
you and I worked hard to capture by force and the
long spear
in days when we were storming the rich cities of
mortals.

After Achilles has said this Zeus says to Hera

So you have acted then, lady Hera of the ox eyes.
You have roused up Achilles of the swift feet.

To which Hera replies

> Majesty, son of Cronos, what sort of thing have
> you spoken?
> Even one who is mortal will try to accomplish his
> purpose
> for another, though he be a man and knows not
> such wisdom as we do.

Homer presents an effect; then a cause. The hero performs a free act of his own will, as Napoleon did at Borodino. Yet that act is, without his understanding how, part of the process of history. Napoleon on the battlefield 'awaited the end of this action . . . which he was unable to arrest'. The narrator as the total consciousness of history places the hero's actions within the larger structure of his own retrospective awareness of the consequences as well as the causes of the actions. But whereas Tolstoi, a child of the nineteenth century, speculates about the nature of historical necessity and sees the will of the gods as merely 'the most primitive approximation'[13] to an intelligible cause, Homer, using the gods as an element in the narrative itself, can make speculation about cause itself take on the texture of narrative discourse. The exchange between Zeus and Hera follows Achilles' speech in the diachronic presentation of the narrative, yet is seen also as the cause of the displayed heroic effect, a cause of which Achilles himself remained ignorant; as Napoleon continued to suppose that the events of Borodino came about through his will.

In the reconciliation between Achilles and Agamemnon in book XIX, the necessary narrative end of the wrath which must separate and unite the deaths of Patroclus and Hector, it is Agamemnon who claims to have been deluded and that Zeus and Destiny and the Fury that walks in the mist have bereft him of his wits. Agamemnon's long speech is framed by two short ones from Achilles. In neither does he mention Delusion (*Ate*). First he dwells on himself and his wrath.

[13] *War and Peace* XIII.i.

I think
the Achaians will too long remember this quarrel
between us.

Then, after Agamemnon's long speech, he says

. . . But now let us remember our joy in warcraft
. . .
nor delay, since there is still a big work to be done.
So can a man see once more Achilles among the
front fighters.

The contrast between the two presentations is striking. It is not that Achilles cannot speculate about causes: we know he can, and does. After the reconciliation, he says

Father Zeus, great are the delusions you visit on
men.
Without you the son of Atreus could never have
stirred so
the heart inside my breast, nor taken the girl away
from me
against my will and me in helplessness. No, but
Zeus somehow
wished that death should befall great numbers of
the Achaians.

Achilles remains self-regarding; Homer's presentation of him is closer to that of Helen than to the figure and behaviour of Agamemnon. He refers to himself in the third person; he retains a kind of monstrous pride in the consequences of his wrath. He even ends by telling Agamemnon that he would never have got away with taking Briseis if Zeus had not willed destruction on the Achaians. In fact, as Homer presented the events of book I, Zeus's intervention followed, but did not cause the quarrel.

Homer presents Achilles as Tolstoi presents Napoleon: 'He alone, with his ideas of glory and grandeur, his insane

self-adulation – he alone could justify what had to be done.'[14] Achilles likewise, after the cruelly delusive run of Trojan victories, becomes the only hero who can justify as well as accomplish what has to be done, the killing of Hector, the challenge to Apollo and destiny when he nearly scales the walls and enters Troy single-handed, and the fight with the river god: all of this motivated and justified by the death of his *alter ego* Patroclus, who fought in his armour, and foreshadowed his own death.

In the second Epilogue to *War and Peace* Tolstoi seems to express the two polarities within which the story of Achilles is turned into narrative discourse.

> (1) To imagine a man's actions entirely subject to the laws of inevitability, without any freedom, we must assume the knowledge of an infinite number of space relations, an infinitely long period of time, and an infinite series of causes.
> (2) To imagine a man perfectly free and *not* subject to the laws of inevitability, we must imagine him all alone, beyond space, beyond time, and free from dependence on cause.[15]

At times Achilles comes near to being presented by Homer as though he thought himself all alone. Yet Homer binds him into a nexus of causes, through his mother, through Patroclus, through the actions of Hector. But those causes, those dependences, are not infinite. Homer himself selects them and links them into a logic of narrative which, starting from the quarrel and the wrath, proceeds to an end which the reader, once he has got to it, understands to be the only end he *could* have got to Yet all the time, Achilles is seen, and sees himself, as free to act or not to act.

For the modern reader as, I believe, for Virgil, Homer is a presence in the discourse of the *Iliad* of whom we remain continually aware, as he was aware of himself and of the world he was bringing into being. Any discussion of narrative must include the narrator: and how should Homer be any more an exception to this rule than Virgil? When Homer introduced

[14] *War and Peace*, first epilogue, iii.
[15] *War and Peace*, second epilogue, x.

the Muses we must assume that for him they signified something about the creation of literature. They are often invoked before catalogues or complicated passages in which indiscriminate fighting must be sorted out; or as a ritual gesture before the most complicated undertaking of all, the *Iliad* itself. 'Sing, goddess, the wrath of Achilles . . .' Yet they are not invoked before some of the greatest climaxes of the narrative, the deaths of Patroclus or Hector, or book XXIV. The Homer who addresses the Muses clearly distinguishes the role of the composer.

> Tell me now, you Muses who have your homes on Olympus.
> For you, who are goddesses, are there, and you know all things,
> and we have heard only the rumour of it and know nothing.

The composer's task is clear: it is one of selection and presentation, not omniscience. No artist can know everything, nor perhaps does he want to. Narrative is choice. Thus Homer says he cannot provide a complete documentation of the troops in book II. only the Muses can remember everything. 'I will give the leaders and the totals of the ships.' From traditional material like the Troy cycle it is clear that any composer will have to select the wrath of one hero. the return of another. In the great climaxes Homer makes his narrative, as we say, 'speak for itself', not in literal chronicle or documentary but as display. Nowhere is this more strikingly evident than in the death of Patroclus, the most important single element in the narrative of the wrath. Only in that it brings Achilles back into the fighting is the Patrocleia important; in that it does this, it is the most important passage in the poem. Here, and here only, does Homer address Patroclus in the second person. Clearly, like all apostrophe, this one operates as an intensifier [16] but its function inside the

J. Culler, *Pursuit* 138. Homer addresses Achilles at the beginning of his *aristeia* (20.1–2).

narrative cannot be confined within that definition. Homer addresses Patroclus as Patroclus addresses Hector.

> Then did the end of life appear to you, Patroclus
> (Homer to Patroclus)
> Death and powerful destiny are standing beside you
> (Patroclus to Hector)

Homer does not merely recount; he tells us that he is recounting. And he is concerned to ensure that the implied reader understands his role at precisely the most personal and significant passages in the poem. 'Then dying you answered him, rider Patroclus' must be read as 'I Homer, know this, for this discourse is mine.' Homer is not the old impersonal bard, nor the voice and record of an illiterate people. He is the first composer, the first man to be aware of what writing narrative involves, aware that it can be done and that he is doing it. In this way and in no other can he have been a great poet for Virgil and his other classical imitators, all of whom were ignorant of orality. Homer addresses Patroclus alone; but he comments on Achilles. 'Now *although* he [Hector] was a dead man[17] brilliant Achilles spoke to him.' Homer speaks from his overview-point as the total consciousness of the narrative; the tone of admiring yet critical wonder is unmistakably Homer's and seems to be associated particularly with his creation and treatment of Achilles' character as displayed in the narrative. The fact that Hector is dead turns Achilles' two-line speech into a soliloquy, another instance of his enormous self-regard, his sense of himself as set apart

> Die; and I will take my own death at whatever
> time
> Zeus and the rest of the immortals choose to
> accomplish it.

The sequence of events in any narrative has to be seen by the implied reader as though it could be independent of its actual

[17] *Iliad* 22.364 τὸν καὶ τεθνηῶτα.

treatment, not necessarily as though it had actually happened already (as the battle of Borodino actually had, and as the siege of Troy, in some way remote from the *Iliad*, may have happened), but in another sense: that such events might have been codified into other texts than ours using different insights, different rhetorical stratagems – even, conceivably, a different cause of Achilles' anger which would have had different narrative consequences yet might still have reached the end stated by Homer at the beginning of the *Iliad*.

When Homer addresses Patroclus, when he presents Achilles in soliloquy and self-regard as the mirror of a single self-consciousness reflecting upon events then in doing this he draws the reader not just into the presented world of the events and their causes, but into his own presentational mode. We are to suppose that the events narrated took place long ago, in a world without writers. In the greatest passages of the poem, Homer fully assumes the new and masterful role of independent narrator, a narrator who is both teller of the tale and the total consciousness of the events which comprise the tale as he has chosen to tell it. He is also the composer, excited by the new and immense technical problems he has set himself, problems of codification which will give his narrative an internal logic able to work for the naive first-time reader and also teleologically, for the sophisticated reader who must make sense of an ending the poet's opening remarks did not reveal. Somehow from the wrath of Achilles and the woes visited on the Achaians, who won the war, we come to the death of Hector the symbol of Troy. The reason for the poet's intensified and intensifying apostrophe of Patroclus is that in this episode the wrath theme must be changed into a symbolical prefiguration of Troy's fall. There is nothing of the symbolic in Achilles' wrath and withdrawal nothing of the missing larger Troy-tale. Only when Patroclus's death, the last and most terrible effect of the wrath, becomes the cause of Hector's death, does the poet operate a different code of narrative, a brilliant and wholly original shift into a symbolic

mode whose momentum was powerful enough to provide a dramatic structure for Virgil. It is then that the reader understands that the missing Troy tale is not missing at all but is in the text before him.