

MY OWN ILIAD

BY GEORGE KOUMOUIROS

Homer's *Iliad*: a text with past, present and future.

The *Iliad* signifies the dawn of European literature and hence it is the womb of every European literary creation. Its most important 'mega-theme' is the ancient universal phenomenon of war. It was the text upon which the ancient Greek pagan religion was based and simultaneously it was also at the heart of the evolution of the Greek language through its use in the education of the Ancient, Byzantine and Modern Greeks.

The *Iliad* is an ancient Greek epic poem in dactylic hexameter, traditionally attributed to Homer, which originates from the oral tradition of the 8th c. BC; it numbers 15,693 lines divided into 24 books. The text of the poem can demonstrate an immense journey in time and space: from the oldest papyrus of the 4th c. BC to the famous manuscript 'Venetus A' of the 10th c. AD, and from the first edition of 1488 by Demetrios Chalkokondyles in Florence to the most modern digital texts of the University of Harvard, the *Iliad* is the second most read text in the world after the Holy Bible.

The Homeric language is a polymorphic mixture of Ionic Greek with other dialects and presents limitless wealth of vocabulary, variety in grammar and syntax, liveliness in narration and directness in the cinematographic depiction of events, characters and psychological conditions. It is estimated that the Greek language, including all its expressions, is composed by 70%-80% of vocabulary which originates from or is related to the Homeric vocabulary.

The world described in the *Iliad* is our own world. It is a world of gods and mortals, men and women, war and peace, life and death, mortality and immortality. In this world every reader has the unique opportunity to explore the definition of 'human'; we are able to see through the eyes of Achilles the meaning of honour, to feel the anger for injustice, the madness for the loss of the beloved which leads to mass murder, as well as Hector's love for his country and his family. The reader can also contemplate Helen's shame which is the main reason of the war or lament together with Andromache and Hecuba for the death of a husband, a son, or a family; he experiences anguish with Priam as the old well-respected father kisses the hands of his son's killer and asks for his body to be returned. The message of the *Iliad* regarding the change of the human condition from absolute happiness to desolation and misery is the message of human life itself.

However, at the same time the reader of the *Iliad* can become a god and is enabled to feel the absolute power of the Fates who control everyone's life and preserve the cosmic order; he can also discover the will of Zeus for the future, offer help to the Trojans or to the Achaeans and at the same time participate in the divine indifference for the perishable, ephemeral world of the mortals. In the *Iliad* one can walk the bloody soil of Troy amongst corpses of war; travel to Olympus on golden clouds of erotic unions; visit the Underworld of the shadows, a sad reminder of the remains of human life.

The *Iliad* is a contemporary text which can teach us about the consequences of political dispute in times of crisis and war. It is also a text which combines the common with the individual element thus becoming a universal Bible for the most profound definition of the human and the divine. It is a magnificent artistic mirror which reflects in a geometrical way a complex world of emotions or, in other words, the human psyche itself. Concepts like honour, heroism, strife, hubris, punishment, revenge fight with each other and balance each other in the text, offering the first seeds of ancient Greek tragedy and comedy and justifying the diachronic, catalytic impact of the Homeric epic on the world's psychology, philosophy, politics, rhetoric and theatre.

Far and beyond its role as a means that entertains us and enables our journey to the distant world of the mythological past, the Homeric *Iliad* talks about our future as humans and educates us in the importance of values like friendship, fidelity, motherland, family, fatherhood and motherhood, hospitality or concepts like loss, revenge, adultery, death.

From this point of view the text of the *Iliad* emerges from a well of time dating 28 centuries and requests not only to be simply read by us but to be loved with passion and strength of soul as a compass which can lead us to understand our own self.

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