

SYD FEST 19



THE ILIAD OUT LOUD

ADAPTED BY WILLIAM ZAPPA AFTER HOMER

William Zappa

WRITER and DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The Iliad – Out Loud started as an ABC Radio Drama commission seven years ago. I wanted something for actors to read and an Australian ear to hear. Using 17 translations, my journey has been supported along the way by three Bundanon retreats and an original presentation by the Street Theatre of Canberra. I have spent time in Greece with poets, actors and librarians; and been mentored by Emeritus Professor Elizabeth Minchin, Classics ANU.

Over the last three years I have done a number of solo readings of the 'work-in-process': including four at ANU, one at Oxford University and a very lively weekly stint for the Sydney Greek Festival at Steki Restaurant in Newtown.

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THE STORY

The Iliad is a monument to the pain and futility of war. To the glory that it can give. To the destructive power of pride and arrogance. Without covering the whole of the Trojan War, it tells the story of 40 days in the final and tenth year of the mythological conflict – a ten-year battle all for one woman. And, even further, it really takes just a single theme – the fury of Achilles.

It tells Achilles's fury towards Agamemnon and their dispute over the women whom they have 'won' as part of their prize from battle. As a result of their falling out, the Achaean forces to which they both belong are nearly defeated by Hector and the Trojans. Achilles is reconciled with Agamemnon, and the Trojan army is driven back and finally Hector is killed by Achilles. Achilles knows that his own death is to follow soon as foretold in a prophesy. The Gods play a great part in the story and yet, ironically, in spite of their taking sides and helping or hindering the fortunes of both armies, it seems that even They have no real control over FATE.

Pride and honour immobilise Achilles from battle and he never lifts a weapon for 20 of the 24 books. His obsession with a warrior's glory and infamy eclipse any insight.

SPOKEN NOT READ

Homer's great masterpieces *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are from an oral tradition of storytelling. They were meant to be heard.

Robert Fagles says in the preface to his translation of *The Iliad*, '*Homer makes us Hearers, Pope has said, and Virgil leaves us Readers... Homer's work is a performance, even in part a musical event. Perhaps that is the source of his speed, directness and simplicity, and his nobility too...the loft and carry of his imagination that sweeps along the listener together with the performer. For there is something powerful in his song...*'

The Iliad was orally transmitted by guilds of professional reciters to finally be written by Homer or arguably a group of Homers – almost the first wiki and the sum of its whole as a text spoken, written, with additions, corrections and deletions.

The scholarly debate of the origin of The Iliad and Homer himself is divided by centuries of debate by Separatists, Unitarians, Oralists and Analysts, who have all contributed epiphanies of discovery of how the story and style of the poem evolved; even down to the similarities between the epithets repeatedly used with modern day rap's insistent, carrying beat and its predicable, if often approximate, end rhymes.

However, all agree that The Iliad existed as a story with its cast of characters and events and was told/sung/spoken out loud, by a narrator.

WHY THIS STORY NOW?

The Iliad is the first great book of the Western tradition, and the first great book about the suffering and loss of war. Many wishing to make sense of wars in their own time have reached for The Iliad.

'The Iliad still has much to say about war, even as it is fought today. It tells us that war is both the bringer of renown to its young fighters and the destroyer of their lives. It tells us about post-conflict destruction and chaos; about war as the great reverser of fortunes. It tells us about the age-old dilemmas of fighters compelled to serve under incompetent superiors. It tells us about war as an attempt to protect and preserve a treasured way of life. It tells us, too, about the profound gulf between civilian existence and life on the front line; about atrocities and indiscriminate slaughter; about war's peculiar mercilessness to women and children; about friendships and sympathies across the battle lines. It tells us of the love between soldiers who fight together. Most of all, it tells us about the frightful losses of war: of a soldier losing his closest companion, of a father losing his son.' (from Caroline Alexander's, *The War that Killed Achilles – the True Story of Homer's Iliad and the Trojan War*. Published by Viking)

THE PLOT

The 'Greeks' have been laying siege to the city of Troy for 10 years. They are there because the Trojan prince Paris abducted the wife of Menelaus, who with his brother Agamemnon and 110,000 men, sets off to get her back.

Part 1:

Agamemnon and Achilles (the greatest fighter) have an argument over a Briseis and Achilles withdraws himself and his troops from the war. Zeus tricks Agamemnon into believing he will win. The armies face each other. Paris and Menelaus fight. Paris is rescued by a god. The Greeks start to get the upper hand and Hector (Trojan leader) returns to the city to ask the female elders to pray for help.

Part 2:

The Trojans, with the help of some gods, start to push the Greeks back towards their ships. Facing defeat, Agamemnon sends a delegation to persuade Achilles to return to the fighting. He refuses. The gods supporting the Greeks join in to stave off defeat. As night time falls a truce is called for the next day to bury the dead. The Greeks build a trench and defensive wall to protect their ships, hauled up on the beach.

During the next battle the Greeks start to drive the Trojans back but many Greek leaders are injured and the Greeks are forced to retreat. The Trojans try to break through the wall and eventually Hector succeeds. The armies fight around the ships. Zeus is seduced by his wife Hera as a way of making him fall asleep so she can help the Greeks.

Part 3:

The Greeks get the upper hand again. Zeus wakes up and is furious, and sends the god Apollo to help Hector. The Trojans force the Greeks back to the beach.

Achilles's closest friend, Patroclus, distressed at seeing so many Greeks dying and their ships set on fire. He begs Achilles to let him use his armour so the Trojans will think Achilles has returned to the war and will back off. He does and they do. But outside the gates of Troy, Patroclus is killed. Furious at his friends' death Achilles returns to the war. Eventually he comes face to face with Hector. They fight. Hector is killed.

Priam, the king of Troy and Hector's father, begs Achilles for the return of Hector's body, which is brought back to Troy and given full burial rights.

THE CHARACTERS

The Gods

Zeus on the side of the Trojans
Hera (his wife and sister) the Greeks
Apollo (the Archer God) the Trojans
Athena the Greeks
Aphrodite the Trojans
Poseidon (brother of Zeus) the Greeks
Ares (God of War) the Trojans
Hephaestus (God of Fire and Crafts)
Iris (messenger of the Gods)
Hermes (messenger to Zeus)
Dione (mother of Aphrodite)
Thetis (mother of Achilles)

The Greeks

(ACHAEANS, ARGIVES, DANAANS, MYRMIDONS)
Agamemnon (son of Atreus)
Achilles (son of Peleus)
Menelaus (son of Atreus)
Odysseus (son of Laertes)
Diomedes (son of Tydeus)
Calchas (a Seer)
Old Nestor
Patroclus (son of Menoetius)
Great Ajax (son of Telemon)
Little Ajax (son of Oileus)
Idomeneus
Eurypylos
Sthenelos
Tlepolemos
Meriones
Machaon (a healer)
...and more.
Briseis and Chryseis (young Trojan women)

The Trojans

LYCIANS, DARDANIANS, THRACIANS
PHRYGIANS, MYCIANS ...and more.)
Priam King of Troy
Hector (son of Priam)
Paris Alexandros (brother of Hector)
Aeneas (son of Anchises and Aphrodite)
Pandaros (son of Lycaon)
Sarpedon (a 'mortal' son of Zeus)
Polydamas
Deiphobus (a son of Priam)
Glaucus
Idaëus
Cebriones
...and more.
Hecuba (Hector's mother)
Andromache (Hector's wife)
Helen (a Greek)

