

- 1) Book XVII: The stripping of Patroklos' armor and the fight over the body. Achilles still ignorant of the death.
- 2) Book XVIII: One of the great books. Begins with the *akhos* of Achilles: [18.22] A dark cloud of grief [*akhos*] fell upon Achilles as he listened. He filled both hands with dust from off the ground, and poured it over his head, disfiguring his comely face, and letting the refuse settle over his shirt so fair and new. He flung himself down all huge and hugely at full length, and tore his hair with his hands.
- 3) Compare the description of lament sung by Sappho (fragment 5):

“He is dying, Aphrodite;
luxuriant Adonis is dying.
What should we do?”

“Beat your breasts, young maidens.
And tear your garments
in grief.”

The appropriate reaction on the part of women for one who is young, and beautiful, and male, and meeting his *telos*: the rending of garments, the beating of the breast. Achilles here laments as a woman, over his own ‘Adonis.’

- 4) The man of *akhos* now undergoes grief – but for Patroklos, his *alter ego*, the one “whom I valued more than all others, and loved as dearly as my own life” (18.78). In a sense, Achilles sorrows for his own life, which must end after P.’s.
- 5) Achilles’ great speech at the beginning of 18: [107] Therefore, perish strife both from among gods and men, and anger, wherein even a righteous man will harden his heart—which rises up in the soul of a man like smoke, and the taste thereof is sweeter than drops of honey. Even so has Agamemnon angered me. And yet—so be it, for it is over; I will force my soul into subjection as I must; I will go; I will pursue Hektor who has slain him whom I loved so dearly, and will then abide my doom when it may please Zeus and the other gods to send it. Even Herakles, the best beloved of Zeus—even he could not escape the hand of death, but fate and Hera’s fierce anger laid him low, as I too shall lie when I am dead if a like doom awaits me. Till then I will win *kleos*, and will bid Trojan and Dardanian women wring tears from their tender cheeks with both their hands in the grievousness of their great sorrow
 - a) the commitment to pursue Hektor is a commitment to die
 - b) the comparison with Herakles underscores the element of *timeliness* (or lack of it), and god-hero antagonism: Herakles the out-of-*hōra* hero.
 - c) the final sentence intertwines *kleos* and *penthos*: the by-product of heroic *kleos* is always heroic sorrow.
- 6) *Ekphrasis*: literally, ‘a speaking out’. Definition: a verbal representation of a visual representation.
- 7) Most famous ancient example: the Shield of Achilles. Why does ‘time slow down’ for this representation? Why does it fill up half a book?

- 8) Recall the ‘ritual’ of Patroklos’ arming in Book 16, and the importance for the architecture of the *Iliad*: Patroklos’ *aristeia* begins and ends with the all-important armor.
- 9) Achilles’ arming is even more important than Patroklos. If by putting on Achilles’ armor, Patroklos ‘becomes’ Achilles, then what does it mean for Achilles to put on this ‘cosmic’ armor?
- 10) 18.483: [Hephaistus] wrought the earth, the heavens, and the sea; 18.607. All round the outermost rim of the shield he set the mighty stream of the river Okeanos. This is a delimited world: separates the metaphor of the shield from the ‘metaphor’ of the *Iliad*. The *Okeanos* is the limit of the world; in the *Odyssey*, it must be crossed to reach the underworld (*Odyssey* 11.13); at *Iliad* 21.195-9, it is the source of flowing: “deep-flowing Okeanos, from whom all rivers and seas with all springs and deep wells proceed.”
- 11) The world of the Shield encompasses both the *Iliadic* world and—importantly—a non-*Iliadic* world. Note that the shield has not one, but *two* cities: the city at war, and the city at peace.
 - a) The city at war: [509] About the other city there lay encamped two hosts of warriors in gleaming armor, and they were divided whether to destroy it, or to spare it and accept the half of what it contained. A place of terrific horrors: Some way off them there were two scouts who were on the look-out for the coming of sheep or cattle, which presently came, followed by two shepherds who were playing on their pipes, and had not so much as a thought of danger. When those who were in ambush saw this, they cut off the flocks and herds and killed the shepherds. This is hardly heroic behavior – but not un-*Iliadic* (compare the raid of Diomedes and *Odyssey* on the sleeping warriors in Book X!). The shield makes the horrific aspects of war explicit by employing incarnations: With them were Strife and Riot, and fell Fate who was dragging three men after her, one with a fresh wound, and the other unwounded, while the third was dead, and she was dragging him along by his heel: and her robe was soaked in men’s blood.
 - b) The city at peace: [590] In the one were weddings and wedding-feasts ... [and Hymen, and joy and laughter]. But also: [497] Meanwhile the people were gathered in assembly, for there was a quarrel [*neikos*], and two men were wrangling about the blood-price [*poinë*] for a man who had died, the one saying to the *dêmos* that he had paid damages in full, and the other refusing to accept anything. Each was trying to make his own case good, and the people took sides, each man backing the side that he had taken; [502] but the heralds kept them back, and the elders sat on their seats of stone in a solemn circle, holding the scepters which the heralds had put into their hands. Then they rose and each in his turn gave judgement, and there were two talents of gold laid down, to be given to him whose judgement [*dikê*] should be deemed the straightest.
- 12) An amazing thing to have on the shield. The Homeric world recognizes a non-Homeric world: a *dêmos* where trial is substituted for violence. Many resonances outside the ‘limit’ of the shield: the worlds of the shield and the *Iliad* occasionally collide. Recall Ajax’ speech in Book 6.620: [Achilles] is implacable—and yet if a man’s brother or son has been slain that man will accept a blood-price [*poinë*] by way of

amends from him that killed him, and the wrong-doer having paid in full remains in peace in his own locale [*dêmos*].

- 13) The legal dispute on the shield is, in essence, a dispute over one question: what is the measure of the life of a man? Ajax argues that there is always a correct blood-price: the measure can be fixed. Achilles rejects that argument: Akhilles' own sense of self-worth (at least in Book IX) is measureless—or at least beyond the Greeks' measure. After Book 18 the question is now the measure of Patroklos: how much was *his* life worth?
- 14) There's a symmetry to the design. Those who weigh in judgement sit in a holy circle, and the argument takes place in the middle of the circle. These judges then watch on and pronounce *dikê*. A working definition: **dikê**, pl. **dikai** 'judgment (short-range); justice (long-range)'; **dikaïos** 'just'. Yet the elders themselves sit within the middle of a circle (the circle of the shield). Who then sit in judgement on *them*?
- 15) A possible answer: us. The reader as arbiter: is Akhilles acting with **dikê**? What is the measure of Patroklos?
- 16) The *Iliad* begins with a measurement: 1.10: [Chryses] had brought with him a great ransom [*apoina*]. Continues with Phoinix admonition to Akhilles at 9.513: We have heard in song the glories [*klea*] of heroes of old time, how they quarreled when they were roused to fury, but still they could be won over by gifts, and fair words could soothe them. This quarrel of the shield dramatizes the crisis of measurement: what is the man—any man—worth?
- 17) The rest of the shield is beautifully pastoral: the world at peace, and far, far, from the battlefields of Troy. My favorite moment: [590] Furthermore he wrought a green, like that which Daedalus once made in Knossos for lovely Ariadne. There was a dance [*khoros*] there of youths and maidens whom all would want to woo, with their hands on one another's wrists. The maidens wore robes of light linen, and the young men well woven shirts that were oiled. The girls were crowned with garlands, while the young men had daggers of gold that hung by silver baldrics; sometimes they would dance deftly in a ring with merry twinkling feet, as it were a potter sitting at his work and making trial of his wheel to see whether it will run, and sometimes they would go all in line with one another, and much people was gathered joyously about the place for dancing [*khoros*]. There was a singer also to sing to them and play his lyre, while two tumblers went about performing in the midst of them when the man struck up with his tune.

Compare 3.383: No one would think he [Alexandros] had just come from fighting, but rather that he was going to a dance [*khoros*], or had done dancing [*khoros*] and was sitting down." Alexander is, in effect, stuck in the wrong city: should be in the city of peace, not the city of war.

- 18) Funerals and the funeral games: **sêma**, pl. **sêmata** 'sign, signal, symbol; tomb'. Double meaning of *sêma* is played with during the funeral games of Patroklos, part of the hero's *kleos*.

19) 23.249: They then covered the urn [of Patroklos] with a linen cloth and took it inside the tent. They marked off the circle where the tomb [*sêma*] should be, made a foundation for it about the pyre, and forthwith heaped up the earth. When they had thus raised a marker [*sêma*] they were going away

In the case of the Boston Hydria, that *sêma* looks like a big egg. (Unintentional, I think.)

20) Nestor's advice at 23.301: . You are skilful at wheeling your horses round the post, but the horses themselves are very slow, and it is this that will, I fear, mar your chances. ... A man of craftiness [*kerdos*] may have worse horses, but he will keep them well in hand when he sees the turning-post; [324] he knows the precise moment at which to pull the rein, and keeps his eye well on the man in front of him. I will give you this certain sign [*sêma*], which cannot escape your notice. There is a stump of a dead tree-oak or pine as it may be—some six feet above the ground, and not yet rotted away by rain; it stands at the fork of the road; it has two white stones set one on each side, and there is a clear course all round it. It may have been a tomb [*sêma*] of someone long since dead, or it may have been used as a turning-post in days gone by; now, however, it has been fixed on by Achilles as the mark round which the chariots shall turn ...

Double-meaning of *sêma*: both a 'tomb' but also 'sign': what remains of a hero after he is gone. This *sêma* is a guide-post for the living after the hero is gone. The *sêma* is located at a moment of precision: the cunning mortal will discover exactly the right time to make the turn. Also the moment of greatest danger.

21) Conflation of war and games in the final book. 24.1. Then, when he saw dawn breaking over beach and sea, [Achilles] yoked his horses to his chariot, and bound the body of Hektor behind it that he might drag it about. Thrice did he drag it round the tomb [*sêma*] of the son of Menoitios, and then went back into his tent, leaving the body on the ground full length and with its face downwards.

22) The language of war and the language of athletics reflect each other: within the macronarrative of war (*Iliad*), there is a micronarrative of athletics (*Iliad* 23). (This will blossom into its own genre: the Pindaric epinikion.) Language of chariot-racing twisted to fulfil a grim new context: the dragging of Hektor around the *sêma* of Patroklos.

The Shield of Achilles

W. H. Auden

She looked over his shoulder
For vines and olive trees,
Marble well-governed cities
And ships upon untamed seas,
But there on the shining metal
His hands had put instead
An artificial wilderness
And a sky like lead.

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,
No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,
Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood
An unintelligible multitude,
A million eyes, a million boots in line,
Without expression, waiting for a sign.

Out of the air a voice without a face
Proved by statistics that some cause was just
In tones as dry and level as the place:
No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
Column by column in a cloud of dust
They marched away enduring a belief
Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

She looked over his shoulder
For ritual pieties,
White flower-garlanded heifers,
Libation and sacrifice,
But there on the shining metal
Where the altar should have been,
She saw by his flickering forge-light
Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot
Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)
And sentries sweated for the day was hot:
A crowd of ordinary decent folk
Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke
As three pale figures were led forth and bound
To three posts driven upright in the ground.

The mass and majesty of this world, all
That carries weight and always weighs the same

Lay in the hands of others; they were small
And could not hope for help and no help came:
What their foes like to do was done, their shame
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
And died as men before their bodies died.

She looked over his shoulder
For athletes at their games,
Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music,
But there on the shining shield
His hands had set no dancing-floor
But a weed-choked field.

A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
Loitered about that vacancy; a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises were kept,
Or one could weep because another wept.

The thin-lipped armorer,
Hephaestos, hobbled away,
Thetis of the shining breasts
Cried out in dismay
At what the god had wrought
To please her son, the strong
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
Who would not live long.

From *The Shield of Achilles* by W. H. Auden, published by Random House. Copyright © 1955 W. H. Auden, renewed by The Estate of W. H. Auden.