Classics / WAGS 23: First Essay

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the *Iliad*

Below, topic by topic, are *(1) reflections on what proved to be easy or tricky in answering the prompt (from me and in italics)*, and (2) examples of responses that worked out well.

I. DEMETER AND THETIS

Thetis and Demeter are goddesses whose loss of children sets them apart from the other gods and puts them in an unusual relationship to mortals. **First, discuss the similarities that you find central. Second, how do the goddesses *differ* in ways that indicate the different outlooks of *Demeter* and the *Iliad*?**

Reflections on the assignment: Writers proposed many different patterns of parallel and contrast, and all kinds of alignments could work interestingly. Two glass ceilings on analysis showed up:

(1) Writers made quite variable progress in addressing how the contrasts of Demeter and Thetis suggest the outlooks of the two poems? The essays reproduced below address that aspect of the question systematically.

(2) We did not spend enough time on <u>Demeter</u> to explore how the poem does not just demonstrate gender inequality but goes on to show the softening / equalizing / mediation of gender inequality by marriage (females get something in the give-and-take) and of mortality inequality by the Eleusinian mysteries (mortals get some softening of the god-man divide as a result of Demeter's descent to earth). The <u>Iliad</u> debunks all hopes for such softening / equalizing / bridging of the divine-mortal, male-female divides but tries to find value in the absoluteness of these divides.

I.1

<u>Demeter and Thetis: Differences in Immortal Mourning</u>

There is a fundamental difference between the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the *Iliad*. The *Hymn to Demeter* is purely a story of the gods, while the *Iliad* is a heroic epic that hinges on the inevitability of human mortality, and is thus, at its core, a story of humans. This difference creates a dramatic divergence in the role of the gods, clearly demonstrated by the conflicting

roles of two similar figures—Demeter and Thetis. Demeter is the protagonist of her story, and so her anger at Zeus is the central theme of the narrative. On the other hand, Thetis possesses anger of a similar nature towards Zeus, which she dictates to Hephaistos (Il. 18.501-512), but this wrath cannot be acted upon directly in this *human* story, and so the central theme of anger is passed on to her son, Achilles. Both Demeter and Thetis possess a similar anger towards Zeus for causing their respective grief, but they differ in their reactions—Demeter, the central figure in a story of the gods, is capable of acting on this rage, whereas Thetis, the mother of the central figure in a story of humans, must simply endure her grief and live through the mortal rage of Achilles.

The most basic similarity between Demeter and Thetis is the root cause of their grievances—Zeus. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Helios specifically singles out Zeus as the guilty party in the rape of Persephone (H.H. 13). He refers to Zeus as being exclusively "*αἴτιος*"(responsible), as Zeus was the one who set in motion the plan that led Kore to her marriage with Hades. The audience hears this fact earlier in the hymn, as Zeus is depicted as being indirectly involved—not present for the seizure but allowing it to happen "by [his] design." (H.H. 15)

Similarly, Thetis reveals to Hephaistos in Book 18 that Zeus was the source of her grief "beyond all others." (Il. 18.501) Zeus, scared of subsequent succession and armed with the knowledge that Thetis would bear a son greater than his father, married off Thetis (unwillingly, just like Kore) to the mortal Peleus. Thetis' grief in the *Iliad*, however, is not a result of having to endure Peleus, but rather the result of thus having a mortal son, Achilles. Thetis, as an immortal goddess, should not be required to deal with the bereavement caused by the loss of a child (and this bereavement will be amplified by her own immortality), but because of the self-serving (and self-preserving) designs of Zeus, she is left with a son who will inevitably die. This is where the central theme of human mortality—not present in the *Hymn to Demeter*—comes into prominence, as while Demeter perpetually loses her daughter for part of the year, a conclusion that works for immortals, Achilles is lost to Thetis forever. Furthermore, these grievances are both a result of the succession myth and Zeus' attempts to prevent this from happening. Giving Kore to Hades was intended to stabilize the brotherly alliance following the overthrow of Kronos, while marrying off Thetis was intended to stabilize Zeus' own power.

Both Demeter and Thetis clearly have reason to be angry with Zeus, but they cannot act on their anger in the same way. Demeter personally reacts by withdrawing and disguising herself on earth, terribly afflicting the world with drought. Her anger has a direct result—Zeus sends Iris to Demeter and Hermes to Hades (similar to Agamemnon sending the embassies to Achilles) to arrange a reconciliation (H.H. 22), and thus Demeter is able to leverage her grief and anger into a reunion with Persephone. As the protagonist of the hymn, Demeter is capable of using her anger to withdraw, get what she wants (to a certain extent), and reach the conclusion of the narrative.

On the other hand, Thetis cannot use her anger in the same way to affect the fate of her mortal son—his mortality, the human condition, is inevitable. The image of Thetis is not necessarily a mother grieving for her son, as Thetis does not only grieve for Achilles—she grieves *with* him in the *Iliad*. This is evidenced most clearly following the death of Patroklos, as Thetis mourns alongside Achilles, while the audience cannot help but foresee her mourning the impending loss of her own son (Il. 18.61-64). In a similar fashion, Thetis' and Achilles' anger is connected as well. Thetis cannot act on her anger towards Zeus, but instead this rage manifests itself as the "wrath of Achilles," which becomes the central theme of the narrative. Thetis' power (largely a result of her sway with Zeus) is not discussed directly in the *Iliad* but for a brief mention in Book 1, but her mythology remains resonant. Her role is essential for the benefits it gives Achilles, as his withdrawal, like Demeter's, causes calamity and the eventual embassy in Book 9. As the *Iliad* is a story of heroes, the embassies become the mortals Ajax, Phoenix, and Odysseus instead of Iris and Hermes. The connection between Demeter and Thetis becomes clear in this pattern—the main difference being that Demeter is capable of personally acting on her anger and grief (caused by Zeus) by withdrawing herself, while Thetis is forced to do this through her son, Achilles.

The clear difference between the two stories, however, lies in their conclusions. As a story about immortals, there is no finite end to the story of Persephone, Hades, and Demeter. Rather, there exists a perpetual loop of loneliness, grieving, and reconciliation. These gods remain unconcerned about the human condition and mortality. Demeter's grief always comes to an end; Thetis' grief does not. Although Achilles death is not seen in the *Iliad*, it is foreshadowed dramatically by the death of Patroklos and is a foregone conclusion to the audience. Thetis's close connection to Achilles in the epic, as well as the scenes of her grieving next to him, heighten the audience's realization that she is not far off from being forced to constantly grieve Achilles' death for eternity. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* requires a resolution fitting for immortals, and this endless loop fulfills this. The *Iliad* demands a human one. Therefore it is fitting that Thetis agrees to tell Achilles to return Hector's body to Priam (Il. 24.155-68), as this signifies the end of Achilles' wrath, and thus the conclusion of Thetis' parallel anger towards Zeus and her acceptance of Achilles' mortality.

I.2 (A good application of gender theory, though with occasional conflation of "goddesses" and "women.")

The Agency of Goddess-Mothers in *Hymn to Demeter* and the *Iliad*

In both the *Hymn to Demeter* and *The Iliad*, Demeter and Thetis alternate between powerlessness regarding the loss of their respective children and acts of intervention towards their situations. Though the mother-goddesses are faced with two starkly different types of loss – Persephone is female, immortal, and has already been abducted at the beginning of the tale

while Achilles is male, mortal, and alive but aware of an inevitable death – the way the goddesses approach their losses reflect the types of hierarchies established by the poets of each work, which in turn emphasizes the sources of power in each.

Neither Demeter nor Thetis has control over the loss of her child. Though manifested differently, the source of their powerlessness in both narratives stems largely from gender politics. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter's lack of agency stems from her unawareness of Persephone's abduction until it has already happened, although her daughter's marriage to Hades was actually premeditated (*Demeter* 13). Zeus' failure to inform or consult Demeter regarding the marriage of her daughter creates the boundaries of a gendered hierarchy in the myth: two male gods arrange the future of Persephone without the consent of either woman, establishing the superiority of male will over female as the default arrangement, even among gods. The institution of such a hierarchy is reflective of *Hymn to Demeter*'s role as an explanative myth; the establishment of a clearly gendered social order mirrors and justifies male social superiority among mortals.

Thetis is removed from control of Achilles' death in two intertwined ways that outline both a similar and an additional social order. Firstly, Thetis was married to a mortal without her own consent, which resulted in the birth of a child who will inevitable die (*Il.* 18.503-17). Reaffirming the hierarchy of *Hymn to Demeter*, this aspect reflects a culture in which women, even immortal ones, are routinely subjugated beneath the power of men. Secondly, the goddess cannot alter Achilles' destiny to choose between a long peaceful life or a short one filled with glory. Though gods *can* change "fate," to do so would upset the delicate political balance of Olympus and, particularly in the case of Achilles, have a drastic effect on the mortal world. Thus, although Thetis could technically use her powers to force Achilles away from war or for some other solution, she is forced by both immortal and mortal politics to remain inactive. What agency of choice exists in the *Iliad* is instead given to Achilles, who may choose a glorious short life or a peaceful long one, rather than to his immortal mother. This seemingly contradicts the way immortals are generally portrayed as dominant over mortal beings, but does so in a way that emphasizes more insidious themes of the *Iliad*, particularly the cultural valuation of male choice paired with female passiveness. The women in the *Iliad*, as we've noted, serve as prizes and trophies; Thetis fits neatly into this archetype because although she is capable of helping Achilles in small ways – having new armor made, pleading with Zeus on his behalf – she is ultimately reflective of the other women in the epic in her lack of ability to make any profound impact on the narrative. Unlike the *Hymn to Demeter*, the *Iliad* also implicitly emphasizes the submission of both mortals and immortals to at least some loose definition of fate.

Despite their powerlessness in the loss of their children, both goddesses attempt to work within their power systems to alter their position as much as is allowed. Again, the differences in how this agency is enacted reflect the goddesses' inherently dissimilar situations as well as the difference in what types of power structures are emphasized by their narratives. Demeter is allowed to spend time with Persephone each year after she has threatened the gods by creating a famine which restricts offerings. This allows for the gender contract established in the myth to

be temporarily renegotiated; Demeter can manipulate other gods by using a power that is markedly feminine: fertility. Yet this shift in power is temporary and partial. Although Demeter has gained her daughter back in part, she has not fully reversed the agreement between Zeus and Hades. The myth continues even in its conclusion to illustrate the battle of the sexes, and while women may manipulate men to achieve some of their desires, men are the ultimate victors.

Thetis' options of participation in her son's approaching death are restricted by the already established idea that his death is fated; no matter what Thetis does, her son will die. However, like Demeter, Thetis uses what tools she is allowed by the framework of the epic to influence his life. At first, Thetis tries in vain to warn Achilles to go back to war by pointing out, while in tears, that it will mean her son's death (*Il.* 18.110-14). This unsuccessful attempt shows that no power comes from women's appeals in the *Iliad*, as Achilles chooses glory even in the face of her maternal pain. Upon this decision, Thetis resorts to aiding him in his battle by providing him with special armor made by Hephaestus (*Il.* 18.161-2). This again reads as a gendered act: Thetis cannot even make the armor herself, but must call in a favor to do so. Additionally, Thetis' requisition for Achilles' new armor simultaneously reinforces the superiority of immortals over mortals (it replaces the armor from her wedding to a mortal and Achilles' mortal father's spear). Thetis finds her most successful influence by claiming her position as immortal relative to mortals (to whom they are superior) rather than to fate (to which she must submit) or in her identity as a woman, which is continually devalued by the narrative.

While both goddesses experience moments of powerlessness that are caused largely to the subordination of their gender to men, how they find agency in their situation varies based on the broader social hierarchies of the texts. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter can use the advantages of her gender to negotiate her situation largely because, as an explanatory myth, the exploration of gender relations fits the style, and because regardless of manipulation, the narrative still ends with ultimately male success and no permanent adjustment of gendered power. Thetis, meanwhile, is restricted by her subjugation both to the politics of fate and men. Instead, Thetis turns to the *Iliad's* valuation of glory and immortal goods over mortal ones to find a way to cope with Achilles' inevitable death by giving him armor to aid him in finding glory. In this way, the actions the goddesses take against the loss of their children is indicative of where the characters of either work can find power: the negotiation of gender in the *Hymn to Demeter* and in immortality and the pursuit of glory in the *Iliad*.

II. ACHILLES IN *ILIAD* 1 AND 24

How does Achilles end his role in the *Iliad* in terms that recall and modify the ways that he began his role in *Iliad* 1?

Reflections on the assignment: The art here was to do justice both to "modify" and "recall." Writers proposed appealing interpretations of Achilles' development (in the direction of humanization, compassion, self-knowledge). It was tougher to credit at the same time the obligatory similarities of Achilles between 1 and 24, such that the poet leaves Achilles with the same nature as at the beginning and a capacity to finish out his traditional role at Troy. Beyond that issue, I would be judging and ranking just how fresh and insightful is the analysis of Achilles' changes of heart.

Here are two essays: II.1

II.1

Of Rage and Grief

At the age of twelve, had I been asked to characterize the *Iliad* in a word, I would have blurted out "the *Iliad* is about war." Had I opened the text to the first page of the Epic and seen Homer's initial lines, I might have amended my epithet to "the *Iliad* is about rage." But having read Homer's poem, I will amend my description once more: the Iliad derives its force from Achilles' struggle with rage, grief, and the parallels that link the two. The capstone books of the Epic, books one and twenty-four, highlight and refine this focus. In both books, Achilles, a man only content with sword in hand and blood spraying behind him, must deal with the political manoeuvring that surrounds combat. In both books, Achilles butts up against the emotional pitfalls of his tenuous existence as a demi-immortal and negotiates the differential standards that gods and mortals expect. In both books, Achilles confronts the futility of spending his finite life pursuing treasure, women, and honor. In both books, Achilles finds himself alone. To compare books *I* and *XXIV* on every front would eclipse the scope of this essay, so I will focus on the parallel interviews that Achilles conducts with the leaders of the fighting men, Agamemnon and Priam, the emotional parallels between the two, and the character development towards which such parallels gesture.

The Achilles that appears in contrast to Agamemnon is little more than an emotionally immature, physically precocious youth. The gods provide the impetus for his actions (1.9): his first act, to muster the ranks, comes from the direct "impulse" of Athena. So moved, he acts as an amateur politician, using the bully pulpit of his prowess and heritage to challenge the basis of Agamemnon's leadership. What begins as a reasoned, level headed questioning of the Achaeans' nine years of siege quickly degenerates into a personal outing of grudges, and as tempers flair Achilles grows more petulant than courageous.

The distinction comes clear when Agamemnon asserts that soldiering ability has no link to courage: honor comes not from physical prowess—ability in battle is endowed by the gods, he says—but from the audacity to stand by your men (1.202-210). The accusation destabilizes Achilles' understanding of his purpose. He sees the mission to Troy as a means to win the honor of Agamemnon back for the Greek conglomerate (1.183-91). Achilles can content himself

with such an ancillary aim because he has all of his primary needs satisfied. To fight for Achilles is not to risk death, it is simply to demonstrate his superiority. His life and reputation are not immediately at stake in battle; he has all the trophies and women he actually needs (his later assertion that, if he wished, he could go home to Thessaly and have any women he desired, is telling) and fights only to burnish his honor.

But burnishing honor is not an action worthy of a demigod, and the rage that inflames Achilles comes so abruptly because the stakes are so low. Plundering and sieging to gain honor in the mortal world are not activities fit for a man so powerful that, single-handedly and even without the direct support of the gods, he can slaughter the massed armies of Asia Minor like cattle. His attention wanders. He wants the honor of the gods, of Zeus himself. But he doesn't know how to raise himself any closer to godhead than he has already done, and the intensity of his emotions segregates him from the disinterestedness of the immortals. Isolated both from the humans around him and from the gods by the surety that surrounds his mortality[1] and by the enduring potency of his passions—Thetis encourages his rage, hoping that it will keep him away from death; no other man in the Iliad sustains such anger—the Achilles of book *I* does not fit into his world.

If the opening of the *Iliad* describes the disproportionate, almost god-like rage of Achilles, and the interstitial books catalogue the ramifications of that rage, the epic ends with an emotion that grounds Achilles in humanity: grief. Grief is a mortal emotion. One must experience death to know grief— the only gods who approach the emotional involvement necessary to sustain such powerful sorrow are those with mortal children. But most humans spread their attachment among many people, making the pain of one loss bearable if only because that loss can be shared, distributed, and so eased. Achilles has no network of relationships to coach him through grief. The gods don't understand his preoccupation with Patroclus, and regular humans cannot possibly have experienced so powerful a loss as his—the rulebook for demi-immortal mourning does not exist. While in rage he could rely on his mother for sympathy and a measure at least of empathy (I. 430), in grief he dismisses her coldly (24. 168).[2]

The closest Achilles can come to sympathy from a mortal is the sympathy of Priam, king of Troy. Having lost scores of his fifty sons in the war, approaching death himself, and able to describe the feeling a father experiences when the joy of his life is killed, Priam can pierce through Achilles' barricade. Achilles appreciates the courage it takes to walk into an enemy camp alone, the fortitude that a man must possess to kiss the hands that slaughtered his sons.

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[1] Although other fighters, as mentioned in discussion, do discuss their immanent deaths, their uncertainty as to its time of arrival allows them to sideline their concerns. Some acknowledge that no matter how they act, they will die, so it is better to fight and win passing glory than retreat in cowardice and die anyway. But Achilles knows that he will die only in certain conditions.

[2] Zeus thinks he can melt Achilles' rage with gifts (24.178), further testament to the gods' lack of emotional understanding.

Such strength eclipses the gods. Zeus may 'love the lightning' and wreak havoc willy-nilly, but the pathos that Priam arouses endows him with 'majesty' that commands a different class of respect. And, by demonstrating to Achilles the effect that his own death will have on his mortal father, Priam ties Achilles back to the world of the living. Achilles may exist as close to the gods as a man can, but like all men he must bear the Olympian cocktail of miseries and blessings alone. How can Achilles approach godhead, when the gods live "free of sorrows"(24.614) and his own draught contains so much of it?

A comparison of books *I* and *XXIV*, then, reveals contrasts as bold as the parallels initially appear. The epic poem as a genre thrives on repetition: readers who had listened to days of plot relied on parallel images the way lovers of Wagner identify *leitmotifs* in the Ring Cycle that signal the entrance of important characters. Even moving past the surficial similarities, both books show Achilles as he deals with the emotional consequences of his status as the world's best fighter. But whereas book *I* accelerated the development of the anger that hamstrings Achilles and eventually causes the death of Patroclus, book *XXIV* witnesses the resolution of that anger, an acknowledgement of the human bond that Achilles shares with Priam, and an understanding of the possibility that grief can be shared. Homer invokes the muse to sing of the Rage of Achilles, but the *Iliad* speaks as powerfully to the consequences of grief. And though neither rage nor grief bring the dead back to life (24. 645), in the end it is the grief of Achilles that one remembers.

II.2 The Humanity of a Demigod

The structural similarities and tonal dissimilarities between the first and the last books of the *Iliad* serve to both build up to the climax in the final book and give the audience a sense of satisfaction that might not be indicated if one just looks at the bare-boned plot of the narrative. Homer, following a traditional oral narrative plot arrangement, transparently evokes the beginning of the poem during its last book. This increases the anticipation we feel for whatever Achilles decides to do as he deals with Priam. Due to the outcome of his momentous decision at the end of the Iliad, Achilles ends his role on a higher note than when he entered it, despite – and perhaps because of – his terrible acts and the tragedy that befell him during the main course of the poem. Achilles might not be a dynamic character, but by the end of the epic, he definitely is an illuminated character.

Achilles ends his role in the *Iliad* on terms structurally similar to the way he began his role. Homer highlights and accentuates this with the obvious parallels in plot structure between the first book and the last book – the temporal symmetry of the last book to the first book is quite striking. The mortal-immortal requests (Achilles to Thetis to Zeus in the first book, Zeus to Thetis to Achilles in the last) are essential to the plots of their respective books; the appeals by Chryses and Priam for the return of their children to Agamemnon and Achilles are stylistically similar. Connections can be drawn between the status of Zeus in the first book and Achilles in

the last through the perceived effects of their anger and the deference of their once-challenging subordinates; namely, the threatening personas that Zeus adopts for a time in book one and Achilles has going into book twenty-four convey that they are capable of anything, and therefore demand submission from all those around them. There is arbitration between two opposing factions by a wise mediator in both books; both books handle the appearance or disappearance of Achilles' rage; where the last book begins with the sleep of men, the first book ends with the slumber of the gods.

Despite the incredible amount of similarity in the framework of the first and last books (be it temporal, relational, or thematic), the tone of the last book is radically different from that of the first book. In fact, in almost every circumstance of structural congruency, you can point to an obvious modification of tone from the first book to the twenty-fourth. This is literally illustrated in the way Homer reverses the order of the scheme of days from the first book to the last book, where the tones to the corresponding days are also in stark contrast to one another: the nine days of plague in the first book, a scene of despair and foreboding, is compared to the nine days of gathering wood for Hector's funeral, where although there is unmistakable misery, there is also a sense that at least they are finally putting Hector to rest, a sense of relief. The twelve days of waiting for the gods to return to Olympus at the end of the first book, replete with a feeling of innocuous impatience, is compared to the twelve days of rising godly disgust at Achilles for his treatment of Hector. Even though there isn't a complete reversal of tone for every single structural reflection, all in all they lead to a massively different mood in the final book from the first.

So, what does all of this have to do with Achilles? Well, the mood of the poem definitely takes a turn for the worse in the last book. Achilles is still consumed with sorrow and rage. He contains so much inhuman hate for Hector and desolation for the death of Patroclus that he threatens to lose the last vestiges of his humanity, a humanity that was first cut by his petulance over his affronted honor in the first book and almost cleanly severed by his more justified hatred of Hector. The gods are disgusted at him because he continually tries to mutilate Hector's body, a body Apollo made nigh indestructible. It's almost as if he has surpassed the gods in sheer intensity of emotion – that, or fallen to the level of the beasts. He sees Patroclus in his dreams (admittedly not in the 24th book, but very recently). The reversed mood, along with the temporal similarities, leads the audience on to the conclusion that there is a reckoning coming. A massive change has to take place, or whatever might redeem Achilles from his treatment of Hector will be lost. And Homer brings this about through Priam.

Priam, wrapped up in almost as much grief as Achilles, cannot bear to have his son's body desecrated any longer. Homer, once again using the gods to bring about what probably would have happened anyway, makes the gods spur on Priam to attempt to get his son back, and spur on Achilles to give it. This leads to the real climax the entire poem was heading towards: the meeting of Achilles and Priam. This meeting, similar to the meeting between Agamemnon and Achilles in the first book, shows how the events in the *Iliad* have truly changed Achilles. Priam, the king of Troy, the epitome of the enemy, comes to Achilles, but

doesn't appeal to Achilles through gifts in order to get Hector back, which is what the gods suggested he do. He appeals to Achilles as a father who has to bury his son before his rightful time. It is for this reason Achilles returns Hector to Priam – a purely human reason, divorced from all thoughts of honor or glory. Priam saves Achilles because of his *humanity.* Achilles returns Hector to Priam because Achilles misses and mourns his own father, a father who is going to have to bear the same distress that Priam is bearing right now.

Achilles leaves the *Iliad* in the same mindset perhaps at least topically as the way he entered – a great warrior in perhaps the greatest war ever fought. The repetition of structural themes, along with a foreboding mood, serves to remind the audience that something did happen during the course of the poem, something significant. Not that many of the most central characters have died during the course of the epic. The war is still going on. But the way Homer composed the final book gives the audience a sense of gratification. It conveys a sense of moment when Achilles makes his extremely important decision to embrace his humanity, let go of his god-like rage, and advocate the value of moving on. Despite being confronted by face of his crushing mortality, the inescapability and downright immediacy of his death, Achilles starts to value his humanity, at least a little bit more. And that is the true difference between how he enters the poem and how he leaves it.

III. **SOMEBODY'S SON**

Interpret these two strange rituals and consider how they characterize the different values and outlooks of the two poems.

Reflections on the assignment: This assignment was the slipperiest of the three, especially since it concerned an intriguing gap in the text (what is going on in Achilles' head as he abuses the corpse)? Here are two quite different takes on the issue:

III. 1

This Too Shall Pass:
Ritual Grieving and the Social Order in the *Hymn to Demeter* and *The Iliad*

The goddess Demeter in the *Hymn to Demeter* and the hero Achilles in *The Iliad* both suffer the loss of people they love dearly and, in their grief, both cross (in opposite directions) the divide between immortal gods and mortal humans. Both are motivated to carry out rituals that are horrifying to those that witness them and which upset the boundaries between immortals, mortals, and the dead. However, in each case the ritual has the unintended consequence of restoring the griever to his or her former status in the cosmic social order and ending the challenge she or he poses to the *status quo*. Thus, the *Hymn to Demeter* and *The Iliad*

together portray a vision of ritual grieving as both an intensely personal and a socially normalizing act.

Demeter's ritual focuses on conferring benefits on Demophoön: by placing him in the fire every night, she slowly makes him immortal (*Hy.* 20). Achilles', in contrast, focuses on doing harm to Hector: by denying him burial, Achilles denies him entrance into the afterlife (*Il.* 23 81-83: Patroclus's plea that he cannot enter Hades until he is buried reminds the audience that the same is true for Hector). In this, Achilles' ritual is both the opposite of and equal to Demeter's: while Demeter seeks to assuage her grief by enacting a transition (from mortal to immortal) on the helpless Demophoön in place of Persephone, Achilles seeks to assuage his by *preventing* a transition (from life to death) on the helpless Hector in place of Patroclus.

However, both rituals also have "political" elements that make them more consequential than mere expressions of the griever's mental state. In Demeter's case, this is because her ritual entails a withdrawal from Olympus: as long as none of the other gods can find her, the usual political bargaining cannot take place, her conflict with Hades cannot be resolved, and order cannot be restored on Olympus. Moreover, by simultaneously making herself mortal-like and attempting to make Demophoön immortal, she creates tension along the supposedly impassable boundary separating mortals and immortals. In Achilles' case, the political element comes from the connection between his ritual desecration of Hector's corpse (a manifestation of his godlike wrath) and the funeral games he throws for Patroclus (a manifestation of his godlike generosity): these conflicting markers of his *aristae* are politically problematic for the Achaean camp, as the man committing regular war crimes is also the man behaving like the perfect king. Achilles' ritual desecration also creates boundary tension (like Demeter's ritual consecration), though his acts along the boundary between life and death and plays more off the force of belief (held by both the Achaeans and the Trojans, that the corpse's treatment affects the psyche's status) than Demeter's actual ability to make Demophoön immortal.

While both necessary and intensely personal to the grievers who carry them out, these rituals are incomprehensible and horrifying to the non-grievers who witness them. Metaneira, fearing for her son's life, dares to interrupt Demeter's ritual because she does not know Demeter is a goddess. It is this interruption that brings the ritual to an end and thereby causes Demeter to cast off her mortal form (*Hy.* 20). Once she does so, she is worshipped by the inhabitants Eleusis and becomes available for bargaining: since the other gods can now locate her, they can plead with her to end the blight on the earth and can, eventually, restore Persephone to her for the majority of the year. She is no longer removed from the Olympian social order; while her actions demonstrate her power to the other Olympians, she is no longer creating tension along the boundary between immortals and mortals, and therefore ceases to problematize the Olympian social order and the cosmic hierarchy it reflects.

Similarly, Zeus sends Thetis to plead with Achilles because Achilles' temporary status – as god*like* in the proportions and circumstances of his *aristae*, as the hero of the day – means that the gods cannot simply take Hector's body away from him. Thetis reminds Achilles that his own death is at hand (*Il.* 24 159-161) and that he has incurred the "deathless" wrath of the gods

(*Il*. 24 164), both statements highlighting Achilles' mortality despite the godlike triumph of his *aristae*. Moreover, his resulting interaction with Priam moves Achilles to speak of his own mortality as the crowning "hardship" of his father's otherwise blessed life (*Il.* 24 628-631), indicating that he has taken Thetis's reminder to heart as he relinquishes Hector's body.

The return of the body is the final step in the denouement of Achilles' *aristae*, coinciding with the end of Achilles' role of the perfect king during the funeral games. It signals the loss of his temporarily enhanced abilities both on the battlefield and in politics (the two being almost one and the same in the Achaean social order) and his reawakened awareness of his own imminent demise. Like Demeter, then, Achilles is no longer stands apart from his peers: while he is still the greatest warrior among the Achaeans, he is no longer creating tension along the boundary between life and death, nor does he upset the political relations within the Achaean camp. Thus, he ceases to problematize both the cosmic hierarchy and the local social order.

Both Demeter and Achilles are made "other than what they are" by the intense experience of grief, and both express that grief through radical, personalized rituals that are terrifying and abhorrent to those who witness them. These rituals seem, at first glance, to move in opposite directions: Demeter lowers herself and helps the helpless, while Achilles elevates himself and harms the helpless. However, both rituals bring out into the open the challenge that the griever's state poses to the *status quo*, such that the ends of the rituals result in the griever being restored to her (Olympian) or his (mortal) former position and, with that restoration, the end of the challenges. Thus, the *Hymn to Demeter* and *The Iliad* present concurring visions of ritual grieving as not only an intensely personal and personally motivated act, but also as outlet that ensures that the social order will be restored after being threatened by such depth of feeling.

III.2

As figures that straddle and are able to cross the boundary between mortal and immortal states, Demeter and Achilles, in *The Hymn to Demeter* and *The Iliad*, respectively, both mourn their departed in a way that transcends, yet paradoxically emphasizes, their respective statuses of mortality. The death of Patroclus sends Achilles into a rage that escalates him to godliness, yet his actions are incited, in part, by his knowledge and embrace of his ultimate fate as a mortal: death. Similarly, while Demeter mourns her lost daughter by descending into the mortal realm, she fails to conceal her divinity and ultimately ends up flaunting it, commanding Metaneira to worship and build a temple to her. This theme of true, unconcealable status is extended into the characters' treatments of the stories' "princes", Hector and Demophoon, upon whom they project themselves and the ones they've lost. We conclude from the outcomes of their mourning that Achilles and Demeter are ultimately and inherently different: one is immortal, and the other is not; one can bargain with the gods, and the other must accept their mortal fate. Thus, *The Iliad* is concerned with Achilles' confrontation with his mortality, while *The Hymn to Demeter* is a reminder that, while they may suffer as mortals do, immortals are freer to influence their fates.

There is a great difference in the outcomes of Achilles and Demeter's actions, even when what they do is the same. Both characters, at one point in their stories, decide to abstain from their duties in protest. Achilles retires to his ships, isolates himself from the rest of the Achaeans and refuses to fight. Demeter does similarly, "sitting… apart from all the blessed gods" (21) and withholding agricultural prosperity from the mortals. Zeus and Agamemnon both send gifts through messengers to the boycotters in an effort to end their protests. Both refuse, instead insisting they be given what is denied to them; Demeter demands to see her daughter (22), and Achilles wants to defy his mortal fate and live to see his native land again (*Il.* 9.500-9.505). Yet only Demeter is successful in her boycott, as Zeus relents to her demands (22), despite the fact that both characters had similar leverages in their respective arguments (after all, the Achaeans had as much of a chance at victory as the mortals did at survival without Demeter's crops). While Demeter's passive approach wins back her daughter, the plot of *The Iliad* turns against Achilles, and he is forced into action and confrontation with the mortal death he attempted to avoid in protest. The discrepancy between the outcomes of the protagonists' very similar situations is a testament to Demeter's relative power over her and her daughter's fates. *The Iliad* is more fatalist; despite Achilles' claim that he has "two fates" (*Il.* 9.499), his failure to fulfill the fate he decided upon (to return home and live a long life) is evidence that he has no actual decisive power over which will occur.

Demeter is given more agency because of her status as an immortal. Her divinity is constantly emphasized throughout the story, especially after her descent into the mortal realm, an act of mourning that reflects her daughter's descent into the underworld. Demeter disguises herself appropriately as a barren and childless woman, but her divinity is perceived by Callidice, who tells her, "your aspect is divine" (17). Her godliness is augmented even further when she meets Metaneira: when Demeter enters, "she filled the doorway with light divine" (18). Metaneira's reaction, "wonder, and awe, and pale fear" (18), indicates that her disguise is ineffective, and her act of offering Demeter her throne (18) is symbolic of her putting the goddess above her. It should also be noted that while Demeter should be abstaining from her divine duties in her grief, signs of life and motherhood surround her: the princesses are compared to young animals in spring (17), and Metaneira, who is a foil for Demeter, first appears with a child in her lap (18). It's likely that Demeter is even deliberately allowing her divinity to show. As a beggar, she still paradoxically "commands" (18) the royal Metaneira to make her a drink, and although "the dark robe" she wears connotes homely moroseness, Demeter herself is described as having "slender feet divine" (18). By the time Metaneira passes over her child (19), Demeter is not referred to as 'Deo', her mortal alias, but as Demeter again. Thus, Demeter is unsuccessful in her mourning ritual; mortals still hold her above them instead of acknowledging her degraded status. And it's clear that Demeter herself has other aims in her descent to Earth.

As we see later from her boycott of her duties, Demeter is not interested in yielding to Zeus' wishes and accepting the fate he's bestowed on Persephone. Her descent to Earth is not

an act of mourning, but another passive protest of Zeus' orders. Her attempt to immortalize the infant Demophoon, who stands in for her lost Persephone, is an act of defiance. As Persephone is forced down into the underworld, Demeter raises Demophoon up to the status of a god, symbolically retrieving Persephone. Her projection of her daughter onto Demophoon is made clear by her protectiveness of him, "never… shall spell or sorcery harm him" (19), which arises from her residual guilt at not having been able to protect Persephone. It is only when her plan fails that she resorts to withholding grain from the Earth.

Like Demeter, Achilles is constantly reminded of his true mortality after he's been transformed and elevated to godliness. After he learns of Patroclus' death, Achilles first thought is that his fate has been decided: he won't return home and will die in Troy (*Il.* 18.114-120). He doesn't even consider withholding from battle, as if he didn't even have a decision once the rage had overtaken him. Achilles' divine rage comes to represent his lack of control over the inevitability of his death, which contrasts with Demeter's mediated, passive approach to change her daughter's fate. After he lets loose his godly battle cry, he falls into a very mortal state of anguish, again grieving for Patroclus and acknowledging the inevitability of his own death (*Il.* 18.381-390). The immortals, especially, remind Achilles of death, as it is what ultimately distinguishes him from their ranks. Thetis immediately despairs over her son's short mortal life, even before she speaks to him (*Il.* 18.63-18.75), symbolic of Achilles' lack of choice in the matter. The forging of Achilles' immortal battle armor doesn't remind Hephaestus of Achilles' eternal glory, but the ironic tragedy of his mortal life (*Il.* 18.540-546). Achilles' immortal horses remind him one last time of his mortality, even lording their own over him and reminding him of his place, as he heads off into battle (*Il.* 19.490-495).

If Achilles' rage represents his anger at his mortality, his treatment of Hector's body is an extension of the rage. Although Hector isn't as technically close to the gods as Achilles, he is viewed as a god to the Trojans, a fact that Achilles acknowledges himself (*Il.* 22.464-465). Priam vaunts his divine qualities so greatly that he detaches Hector from himself as describes him as the son of a "deathless god" (24.306-307), a comment that invites comparison to Achilles. By extensively abusing Hector's body, Achilles degrades Hector's status and emphasizes his mortality as an extension of his own. If Achilles' immortality must be smeared by the fact of his inevitable death, then Hector's death must be even more exaggerated. As Achilles is flawless except for the fact of his mortality, Hector's body is beautiful (*Il.* 24.447), and must be destroyed.

Yet like Demeter, Achilles' treatment of his story's prince is unsatisfactory. He kills Hector in order to avenge Patroclus, as Demeter immortalizes Demophoon in place of Persephone, but neither act brings the mourned figure back from the land of the dead. Demeter is eventually able to bargain with Zeus for Persephone, but Achilles is left to drag Hector's body around Patroclus' funeral pyre, mourning ineffectively. As Demeter ends her tale glorified and reunited with her daughter in all her divinity, Achilles comes down from his immortal rage. During his final appearances in *The Iliad*, Achilles does everyday, mortal things: he eats mortal food, and he sleeps (*Il.* 24.728-796). His human side is exaggerated, and we are left knowing that even the greatest of men has his limits.