

# The iliad's ending

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Homer's Iliad is commonly understood as an epic about the Trojan War, but its meaning goes deeper than that. The Iliad is not only a story of the evolution of Achilles' persona, but at times it is an anti-war epic as well. The final book proposes many questions to the reader. Why not end with the killing of Hektor? Most stories of war conclude with the triumphant victory of good over evil, but in the Iliad, the final thoughts are inclined to the mourning of the defeated Hektor, which accentuates the fact that good has not triumphed over evil, but simply Achilles triumphed over Hektor. Ending with the mourning of Hektor also brings to center stage for the first time the human side of war and the harsh aftermath of it. We see that war not only brings great glory, but also much suffering and anguish. Homer puts his anti-war views on display. Homer drives home the bleakness and hopelessness of war with his final book. When thinking of a war, the first thought to pop into one's head is most likely death and suffering, not great triumph and glory. For a great majority of the Iliad, however, Homer writes about the winning of glory, and the pride taken in killing a foe. This gives war an entertainment value, and makes it seem that it is a good opportunity to be fighting in a war. This is not the case whatsoever. With the mourning over the prestigious Hektor, it makes the reader realize that no matter how much glory is attained through battle, the fact remains that you are fighting a war and your life expectancy subsequently drops dramatically. The sadness that war creates is neglected for much of the Iliad, but in book twenty-four, the point is emphasized thoroughly. Beginning with the speech of Cassandra to the Trojan people, the entire city is portrayed as completely engulfed in sorrow. She says, " He was a great joy to his city, and all his people," The

sense of loss is great and stings deep in the Trojan hearts. The pain is exemplified even further with the speech of Andromache, wife of Hektor. With this we see for one of the first times the importance of family to the Trojans. Andromache's suffering is extreme and harsh. When she says, " But for me passing all others is left the bitterness and the pain," it shows the importance of the husband to the wife. This speech is very pivotal in depicting the bleak future for the widows whose husbands left them behind to die in search of honor. Now that the husbands are dead, the once noble wives and children must go work as slaves, once their city is sacked. Andromache and Astyanax are doomed to lead a wretched life, because their protector is dead. Such is the nature of war. Were Homer to end with the killing of Hektor and Achilles' triumph, the melancholy aftermath would be totally neglected. Another effect of Homer's final book of the Iliad is it affirms the thought that neither Achilles nor Hektor are the bad guy, but both are worthy of glory and praise. A fair generalization about heroic stories is that the good guy always win. It is cliché, and very common, but it is a fact. The Iliad goes beyond this commonplace, by pitting two forces against each other, none of which can be characterized as the good guy or the bad guy. While the entire poem is about the glory of Achilles and his god-like superiority to all men, Hektor needs some appreciation as well. Homer balances the great commendation of Achilles throughout the poem with his speeches of the four mourning women. The significance of having Helen, Andromache, Hekabe, and Cassandra speak of the greatness of Hektor is that it shows the span of his influence. It is obvious that if men of the military were speaking of their leader, there would be nothing but praise, but not

only does his lonesome wife and saddened mother weep over him, but so does a young girl, Cassandra, and a relatively new acquaintance to him, Helen. His influence ranges all ages and genders, and he gets the attention he so rightly deserves in this last book. This helps the reader see that in war there is no outright winner or loser, no outright good or bad, and that both sides experience great loss. The final book has a very downtrodden tone, and despite all the fame and greatness Hektor has acquired, all is lost in Troy, as a result of his death. Homer must be portraying an anti-war attitude here, otherwise he would surely end the play with the triumph of Achilles, or the victory of the Argives over Troy. If he had positive or even neutral thoughts about war, he would end with an upbeat triumph, but he does not. The final book makes the Iliad out to be a tragedy, which is exactly what Homer thought war was, an unnecessary tragedy. The point that Homer wants to get across with his final book is that all the action and all the fighting that went on for all those years is not something to be proud of, for it ruined multitudes of lives. The extreme agony and woe only help to show that Homer believes that the positives of war could never encompass all the sorrow and negative consequences of war.