

On Winged Words: An Examination Of The Use Of Language In The Iliad To Create And Access The Poetic Space

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Abstract

I am a Mathematics and Elementary Education double major, but have always felt drawn to the literary world. Pulled by these words and enabled by the freedom of a liberal arts education, I pursued my interests regardless of their discipline. During a reading-and-writing-intensive summer undergraduate research opportunity, I poured over the work of Homer, Shelley, and others and wrote my own 100+ page paper, in which I explore the strange beauty of poetry, the purpose and presence of language, and the connection between poetry and the soul. This paper serves as the basis of my present proposal. Looking closely at poetic language in *The Iliad*, our examination takes the conventional sense of poetry a step further to examine its connection to the soul in conjunction with the poet's (and others' within the poem) ability to use language and other poetic gestures to create the poetic space. We posit that this poetic space is a psychological place—for, of, and in the soul—which is unlocked by poetic language and in which one can see and interact with the events and people of poetry throughout the years (for example, in this space one can see the language of the poet come to life and illustrate the heroic exploits of Achilles in the mind's eye). Specifically, this paper includes close-readings and careful studies of: the proem; the speeches of divine, semi-divine, and mortal figures; and the varying types and forms of language used throughout the poem (i.e./ figurative language, oaths, epithets, similes, etc.). Each of these studies of the language of the poem yields evidence of the poetic space and reveals a common thread that is tied to epistemology. Poetry, then, is a result of experiencing truth and the poetic space informs our knowledge and how we come to know it. In this discussion we find poetic moments, the soul, and truth all inextricably linked. The closer we look at the poetic language of *The Iliad*, the wider the door to the poetic space opens—all that is left now is to enter it.

Keywords: Poetic, Iliad, Language

1. Introduction

For years, *The Iliad* has been the center of much scholarly attention and debate, not the least of which is the controversy that shrouds the identity of its author(s) in mystery. While we acknowledge the “Homeric Question,” we shall refrain from entering fully into the debate at this time. For the chief concern of this paper regards the question of poetry itself and the ways in which the poet subtly and powerfully manipulates the qualities of language to paint pictures grand and grotesque—moments that transcend time, space, and pre-conceived notions. Indeed, as Richard Martin points out, concerning the creation of *The Iliad*, “individual genius is not required...the genius of Homeric poetry is the powerful and flexible imaginative conception that keeps renewing itself through generations of performers and audiences.”¹ It is this conception and its continued renewal, contained and created in the language of the poem—which we deem the poetic space—that serves as the focus of our meditation on *The Iliad*. We focus in on the art of *The Iliad*, itself, and

examine examples of poetic moments, language, and gestures in order to demarcate a poetic space wherein readers across borders and time can enter into this communion of the art of language.

This poetic space is the most critical and crucial aspect of poetry for it is the place in which we witness and can create poetic moments. Poetry, *poesis*, means “to make” and the poetic space is precisely what is made. It is a place of and in the mind where the reader has access to the insights of the poet and the poem’s figures—to truths which we see embedded in their poetic moments. It is where we realize our own capacity for poetry and can respond in kind. The poet creates this space by elevating and refining his language and the images they evoke so that we can enter, experience, and see the truth—see the beauty—hidden within the poem’s language.

Then, because our exploration of *The Iliad* is so centrally focused upon the poetic, we now more purposefully delineate what we mean when we talk about poetry and how it strays from the typical conceptions of poetry. As Jorge Luis Borges’ posits concerning the art of poetry:

nowadays when we speak of a poet, we think only of the utterer of such lyric, birdlike notes as “With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh,/ Like stars in heaven” (Wordsworth), or “Music to hear, why hear’st though music sadly? / Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy” [Shakespeare].²

With this perception of poetry, one might readily identify *The Iliad* as a work of poetry and its author a poet based solely on its moments of pleasant verse; one might accurately highlight the Homeric similes and other examples of figurative language poetic, instances in the epic that add emotion or intensity to the story playing out on the pages. However, this more conventional definition has its limits. We therefore refine our lens of thinking, taking cues from Percy Bysshe Shelley and how he defines poetry in his “Defence of Poetry”, a work in which he often referenced the cornerstone of Western Literature as we understand it: that is, *The Iliad*.

To be more precise, in our examination we look for moments of poetry which include anything the audience experiences by seeing, hearing, or feeling and which the poet and figures in the play create by speaking, singing/playing, weaving, crafting, acting, and so forth. All examples of imaginative or creative language, elevated or sublime expressions, similes, metaphors, and other such figurative language are thereby indicators of poetry. We then use Shelley’s redefinition of poetry to aid in our examination of these, asserting now our mantra that will serve as our guiding force and chief goal in the examples of poetry we pull out of *The Iliad*: namely, “poetry turns all things to loveliness.”³ In all of its forms and nuances, the poetic distorts order and orders chaos; reveals hidden beauty and exposes false claims of beauty; and speaks to the truth we see and sees the truth in what we speak. In the images they create, these poetic moments of the poem—ironic, bold, figurative, challenging—all contain a power that sets them apart from the ordinary moments. We gravitate towards and choose such moments.

2. Turning To The Text: Witnessing the Art of *The Iliad* Through Close Readings of the Text

Now, what exactly does *The Iliad*, itself, tell us about poetry? In his manipulation and command of language throughout *The Iliad*, the poet invites us into the poetic space. Upon entering, the poet reveals to us its various components. We embark on our study in earnest by tuning our ear to hear the voices of the poet and the characters of the poem and training our eye to examine the art of *The Iliad*. We look here at a few instances of seemingly strange, but powerful, beauty in the poem and then move on to a brief, but careful, study and overview of the speeches of divine, semi-divine, mortal, and other figures.

3. Apollo’s Simile

First, let us examine a seemingly simple but incredibly powerful simile—in fact, the first simile of the epic, which sets the stage for the grand and deep Homeric similes to come with a depth all its own packed with a punch into a single line of text. The principles of close reading tell us that order is important and so we pay attention to that which is first, and of course this encapsulates similes. Note that in the passage describing the conflict between Agamemnon and Apollo’s priest in the opening scene of the epic poem, we see that the first simile of *The Iliad* is brief but powerful as it breathes of the poet defying our expectations and reveals language that is poetic, effectively demarcating the poetic space. In the midst of his anger and the clashing of his silver bow, Apollo (who ultimately becomes known as god of the sun⁴) “came as the night comes.”⁵ Fleeting as it is, this simile is nonetheless quite compelling as it defies

our expectations of this god, the god of sight (and later the sun), giving us an entirely unexpected comparison of two things utterly opposed to each other (light and the very absence of it). Even still, somehow in this poetic space, the simile endows Apollo with more power and more brilliance than all the power of daylight.

When we look at how night actually comes, we see that it is wrapped up in a bit of a paradox, for it comes slowly and then all at once. The light fades, dims, even changes colors, and then all of a sudden there is blackness punctured first by one glimmering star, then another, and then a multitude, setting the sky ablaze. This changing reflects the actions and feelings of Apollo, who brews in his anger, clashing his silver bow, maybe dimming in the brightness of his divinity as anger takes hold and darkness descends; it is a slow build up to the assault, and then all at once, the sun disappears and the god of the sun that is no longer there lets loose an arrow and the attack begins in earnest as he comes as the night comes. Returning to the image of night, we see the sun disappear under the horizon, replaced by the black sky, moon, and stars. In this simile, the poet inserts the sun in a scene where it simply does not belong—he paints a picture of night with a brushstroke that includes all the brightness of the sun.

But it is not just in the simile itself that the poet casts Apollo in this shade of night. For surrounding the simile of Apollo coming as the night comes we see the poet extend the image in his description of Apollo unleashing his reign of terror; his developing actions mirror the progression of night. Keeping now this image of how night comes which we have just described (slowly, dimming, then all of a sudden dark), see Apollo come in just such a way. After the priest of Apollo spoke his prayer, “Phoibos Apollo heard him, and strode down along the pinnacles of Olympos, angered in his heart,”⁶ see Apollo striding, walking slowly, perhaps picking up speed gradually, as his color dims and changes, angered as he is in his heart. He is “carrying across his shoulders the bow and the hooded quiver; and the shafts clashed on the shoulders of the god walking angrily;”⁷ hear him now as his walking picks up speed and intensity, accompanied by the clashing of his weapons echoing his anger—an anger, note, which has grown and which penetrates his walk (he has gone from striding, angry just in his heart, to actually walking angrily). It is a slow build in anger as Apollo approaches, coming “as night comes down”, but then all of a sudden he is there and it is dark; for he “knelt then,/ apart and opposite the ships and let go an arrow”⁸—notice, “an arrow”, a single arrow. The singularity of the lone arrow⁹ which Apollo lets fly is like the first drop of rain in a storm or the first piercing star in the night sky. And so, too, we see that his attack progresses in the same way that night does: slowly, steadily, and then suddenly. “Terrible was the clash that rose from the bow of silver”—listen to the clash, a singular clash from a single arrow—and now see how “First he went after the mules and the circling hounds, then let go/ a tearing arrow against the men themselves and struck them”—again, “a tearing arrow”, a single, tearing arrow—and then of a sudden realize that the pain, the terror, the night of Apollo has fully descended and see how “the corpse fires burned everywhere and did not stop burning.”¹⁰ The poet extends the simile to mimic the coming of night as we see first one arrow hitting one victim and we feel his pain, and then of a sudden there are corpses so many in number that fires are needed to try to ward off the night, but there is no stopping the night of Apollo now, and these corpse fires keep burning. He comes slowly at first, just like night does, but then he is fully and finally there, and the darkness of night does not pass, does not ease up in the slightest, until morning; just as there is no escaping the night, there is no escaping Apollo’s terror until it is complete—until the light of dawn shows at long last.

Hence, in this example we see the poet paint a dark and different portrait of Apollo. As he extends the simile of the night, we see the full scene and development of his anger unfold, progressing in the same manner of night, and laying hold of the Achaians just as strongly and steadfastly as the darkness. And in all of this, we see the god of the sun shadowed in a new light (or rather, lack thereof). In the poetic space then we see not only gods crossing over into the mortal world, but also changing their forms and departing from their typical roles as the god of the sun becomes night itself when he comes to unleash his wrath on the Achaians. With this simile, the poet paints a picture of Apollo’s power, while also revealing an unexpected and even dark change in the god. The poet was completely conscious of his word choice—this particular picking and placing of a simile. In the opening book, we see the first budding fruit of the poetic space, as the poet introduces his first Homeric simile.

4. Even Corpse Fires...

We look deeper now into that particular passage of poetic prominence wherein the poet gives us the image of how “the corpse fires burned everywhere and did not stop burning.”¹¹ The image is a strong one, but in his poetic language, the poet does exactly what Shelley claims poetry does—that is, it “turns all things to loveliness”¹²—even corpse fires. We pause now to qualify what exactly we mean when we say loveliness, for the idea that corpse fires continually burning are lovely may be a bit discomfiting at first glance. We are not alone in our quest to understand the strange loveliness that exists in such intense images; indeed, the paradoxical pleasure humans seem to derive from looking at apparently morbid representations is a topic that can be traced back to Aristotle. We turn now to his *Poetics* for help

understanding why “we delight in contemplating the most accurately made images of the very things that are painful for us to see, such as the forms of the most contemptible insects and of dead bodies”¹³—why we can look at the corpse fires continually burning and deem it a moment of poetry, of loveliness. As Aristotle answers his own inquiry (and ours), we learn that:

what is responsible even for this is that understanding is the most pleasant not only for philosophers but in a similar way for everyone else...They delight in seeing images for this reason: because understanding and reasoning out what each thing is results when they contemplate them.¹⁴

We long to understand; we thirst for knowledge. Our souls reach out for a hint of recognition in these images and representations—even of pain, of something dark we cannot acknowledge in reality. In the poetic space our souls have a chance to look without blinders at all the pain and pleasure of our distorted realities; our souls have a chance to share the pain they contain and respond properly to the pain of the departed shades represented in the image who may not have necessarily received their due in real form; for in the moment of the corpse fires actually burning, one would turn away and the shades of the bodies in the fire would be abandoned and forgotten, but in the image which the poet presents us of the fires in words, we can pause to look, to feel, to mourn, to share. Our need to see representation of what we cannot face in reality and our need to connect are a part of what make corpse fires lovely.

And so, poetry presents us with images, with representations, so that we can see the truth that we need to see. Indeed, a poem “is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.”¹⁵ Poetry is the “mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.”¹⁶ Truly, it is the mirror by which the most hideous death is reflected into something better—by which corpse fires are made lovely; and we are able to look at it through this poetic lens and experience it outside of our limited understanding, in order that we might come closer to these eternal truths. “Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world,”¹⁷ and these truths are realized in the poetic space as we, at last, are able to confront them in the form of the representations which the poet constructs. “Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.”¹⁸ Though disguised in the vices and manipulations and faults of its characters, the beauty of the eternal truths of the invisible world of mankind cannot forever be hidden and is at the core of poetry, reflected fully in the creation of the poetic space. Yea, we see, just as Aristotle and Shelley have seen: “Poetry turns all things to loveliness”¹⁹—even corpse fires.

5. Thetis, Her Simile, and Knowing

Yet another passage portraying the art of poetry in *The Iliad* is contained in Thetis’ simile near the end of the first book. Achilles calls on his mother for help restoring his honor after he was disgraced in his feud with Agamemnon toward the opening of the book, “and lightly she emerged like a mist from the gray water.”²⁰ There exists another layer of depth in this simile in the poet’s choice to compare the goddess to a mist, for later throughout the epic, the image of the mist is associated with death. Thus, the poet’s simile elevates the language of the poem, marking the formation of the poetic space, while also foreshadowing the mist that shall cover the eyes of many to come, Achilles included.

Further, look at the poetic language that surrounds and runs through this scene between mother and son. The very scene begins and the tone is set with poetic language as we see “Achilleus weeping...beside the gray sea looking out on the infinite water.”²¹ Weeping is made beautiful by these poetic words and we see the water described with infinite imagery; the picture of the gray sea out of which Thetis rises like a mist is formed first in these words to be reinforced later in the simile, and another quality of the poetic space is revealed; for in the infinite water is echoed the infiniteness of the poetic space. Achilles is looking out upon the infinite water, longing not just for the honor that is his due nor only for his mother who will fulfill it, but also longing for the infinite glory (the closest he can get to the immortality that he desires) that the poetic space can give him. We draw on the ideas of Gregory Nagy regarding *kleos* and the poet’s (poetic space’s) role in it to aid in our discussion of Achilles’ longing and the infinite water.

Etymologically, *kléos* should have meant simply ‘that which is heard’ (from *klūō* ‘hear’)...But then it is actually [the poet] who recites [the epic] to his audience...In a word, the Hellenic poet is the master of *kléos*. ‘That which is heard,’ *kléos*, comes to mean ‘glory’ because it is the poet himself who uses the word to designate what he hears from the Muses and what he tells the audience.²²

The poet takes the tradition or story or message of the Muses (however their relationship is interpreted) and “he passes on the *kléos*, let us call it ‘glory,’ of heroes.”²³ It is no secret that Achilles longs for glory (in fact, we see him ask

Thetis to ask Zeus to bring about the death of scores of Achaian soldiers whom he has fought beside for so long in order that he might have the honor and glory he sees as his due²⁴). Glory is a thing imaginary and immortal, as it is not clothed in decaying flesh as Achilles is. As such, it can be achieved only in the infinite poetic space, for “poetry confers glory.”²⁵ It is well known (even, as Nagy points out, by the Trojans) that “if you perform heroic deeds, you have a chance of getting into the Achaean epic. The Achaean singer of tales is in control of the glory that may be yours.”²⁶ Achilles, on some level, realizes this—that the poet can help him achieve immortality at least in part by establishing his *kleos*—glory—in the poetic space so that it can continually be known and conjured up in the lives of all who read and imagine the story of his glory in the poetic space. Thus Achilles looks at the infinite waters longing for the infinite glory that exists in the infinite poetic space. And Thetis rises out of the infinite waters to her son. In this longing and this rising is found a melding of two worlds in the infinite. And such is the poetic language that sets the scene.

On the other side of the simile, we see poetic language that is tied to another principle of the poetic space concerned with knowing. Upon arriving and seeing his distress, Thetis instructs Achilles, “do not hide it in your mind; thus we shall both know’.”²⁷ This seems like a reasonable request from a concerned mother to her son, but in Achilles’ response is raised a valid point and we begin to look closer at their interaction; for Achilles replies, “sighing...’you know; since you know why must I tell you all this?’.”²⁸ Indeed, Thetis, as a god, is gifted with the ability to see from afar, so she already knows what Achilles is angry about because she witnessed it actually happening to him. Because of this awareness, she is not merely asking him to repeat it to check his facts; rather, she needs to see him tell it once more—to see his emotions, rage, all that is contained inside of him that does not come across in just words but which requires sight to know. Moreover, in having him repeat all the events she is helping ground his own knowledge of his anger and of his self. As he repeats it, he sees it all, knows it again more fully, and is more aware of the true nature of his feelings. In his retelling, we begin to see already a change in his feelings and his perception of what has happened to him, for he merely mentions Briseis, the apparent origin of his anger, in passing, and not even directly by name. He says in the flow of his angry retelling that “even now the heralds went away from [his] shelter leading Briseus’ daughter, whom the sons of the Achaians gave [him].”²⁹ That is all the mention he makes of her, continuing on his supplication and launching then into his request for honor.

And so we and Achilles see the focus of his anger begin to change and morph into what we will see more fully in Book IX when he speaks again. Seemingly a completely changed man, he voices the innermost truths of his heart, anger, and the poem, claiming:

Fate is the same for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard.
We are all held in a single honor, the brave with the weaklings.
A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much.
Nothing is won for me, now that my heart has gone through its afflictions
in forever setting my life on the hazard of battle.³⁰

This then, this disillusioning discovery that life is not fair and of the futility of fighting, is what lies at the heart of Achilles’ anger and is that from which he asks Thetis “to protect [her] own son.”³¹ When Thetis asks Achilles to communicate again his frustrations and anger, this is what she sees; as he recreates his pain through his own words, this is what Achilles begins to see; and as we are afforded the same view in the poetic space, this is what we see: a picture of pain that becomes clearer after we see Achilles again in Book IX. These two portraits of the hero lend depth and insight into his character and the theme of the poem. In the poetic space, the poet grants us a privileged position and authorizes us to see and know things the mortals in the play might not. Although the poetic space is a psychological place, and while some may know it on their own, the only way to truly enter in and make it real is to speak it and thereby create it with language as the poet is doing with the poem.

6. More Poetic Moments And Seeing Truth

Now, the more we look at the text, the more we see that, while language is a crucial part of the poetic space, there is, indeed, more involved in what constitutes the poetic. In all of the instances of the language of the gods and humans in the poems, as in the simile we just explicated, it becomes increasingly apparent that language alone does not create the poetic space. Underlying the poetic sphere is the character of those speaking more than their actual language. Indeed it seems that in *The Iliad*, human or divine character is intrinsically poetic, and, moreover, this capacity for poetry (or poetic character) is integrally connected with seeing the truth. There just appears to be a natural capacity for poetry, which we see in the poet and in certain characters, mortal and immortal alike. The capacity for poetry has something to do with seeing some sort of truth. Consider the cases of Thetis, Zeus, Hera, Hephaistos, Sarpedon,

Achilleus, Helen, the poet, Glaukos (with the leaves of men simile), and so on—almost all of their poetic moments appear connected to knowing or seeing truth.

We see Thetis' poetic character connected to her intuition about knowing; she needs to see Achilleus retell his pain so that they both (and the reader) may truly know it. Zeus' poetic moments of silence and the thunderous, Olymposhaking nod are so powerful and poetic because he knows and foresees the truth of what they ultimately mean: namely, the deaths of thousands of Achaians and Trojans and turmoil among the gods. This turmoil is what Hephaistos sees³² as the truth of what the gods' meddling in mortal affairs will bring about; his poetic gestures of craftsmanship with the houses of the gods, the shield of Achilleus, and the comedic act of serving the other gods are all in response to that knowledge; additionally, his craftsmanship on the shield serves a twofold purpose in that it reveals the truth he sees in such a way that lets us see the truth too. Hera sees the interaction between Zeus and Thetis and that is where her challenging/defiant/Helen-like language stems from—in response to the truth she sees. Sarpedon sees the truth of the heroic code and the reason why they are fighting and why they cannot back down; he reveals this in his language. Achilleus, too, on some level sees the truth in his anger, his mortality, and in his power struggle with Agamemnon; furthermore, as he sees the truth of his anger and his desires more and more clearly, the poetry of his language and gestures evolve to fill completely his intrinsic poetic character. Helen sees the truth of her situation, her helplessness, and her language conveys her lamentations; she sees the truth of the fighting between the Trojans and Achaians and weaves it into her robe; and she sees the truth of her powerlessness as she succumbs to the manipulations of the goddess. And then, Glaukos reveals the truth he sees in their fighting and in the *xenia* that can survive even the horrors of war as he waxes poetic with the generations of men and leaves simile and ensuing family history; the simile paints the hidden parallel between men and leaves as the young grow to replace the fallen elder generation.

7. Even Horses

In light of this connection between poetic character and seeing truth, there is one more example (one last category of figures we should examine) that is especially interesting and noteworthy and which stretches this capacity for poetry beyond humans and gods to include animals as well. In Book XVII, in the midst of the battle raging over Patroklos' body, the poet shows us the horses of Aiakides—indeed, he shows us their poetic capacity which surfaces in response to the truth they see. The scene revolves around the fallen body:

But the horses of Aiakides standing apart from the battle
wept, as they had done since they heard how their charioteer
had fallen in the dust at the hands of murderous Hektor.
In truth Automedon, the powerful son of Diores,
hit them over and over again with the stroke of the flying
lash, or talked to them, sometimes entreating them, sometimes threatening.
They were unwilling to go back to the wide passage of Helle
and the ships, or back into the fighting after the Achaians,
but still as stands a grave monument which is set over
the mounded tomb of a dead man or lady, they stood there
holding motionless in its place the fair-wrought chariot,
leaning their heads along the ground, and warm tears were running
earthward from underneath the lids of the mourning horses
who longed for their charioteer, while their bright manes were made dirty
as they streamed down either side of the yoke from under the yoke pad.³³

In this passage we see that even horses are endowed with and have the capacity for poetry. We see this revealed in their poetic gestures: namely, their crying, mourning, and refusal to leave Patroklos' body, in addition to their very embodiment of his grave.³⁴ This brief description of the horses is charged with emotion; the language is haunting and the image painted of the mourning horses is striking. We feel the pain of the horses of Aikides as they weep—and as they have been weeping for a very long time, since Patroklos first fell. The description of how they are not willing to move is extensive,³⁵ the poet's words here crossing the Helle and back to the fighting Achaians unlike the horses they describe. And then we have the elaborate simile likening the horses to a grave. In a battle where many fallen soldiers go left unburied, unmourned, to be the dinner of birds and dogs, these horses of Aiakides want to make sure their master is not among the forgotten animal fodder; and so they stand as his grave, themselves, a living, breathing, evermourning testament to their beloved charioteer. Standing motionless by Patroklos' body, they are his tomb, his grave

monument, and their weeping serves as a remembrance of Patroklos' life and bravery in it, and also as a reminder to those left behind—those witnessing this scene on the battlefield and those reading it now, immortalized as these actions are by the poet's words. For in the midst of a war, these horses take the time to pause to grieve, to remember. This then, is the essence of poetry.

Furthermore, we see that this remarkable response and revelation of poetic character in the horses is also tied to seeing truth. The immortal horses have seen their beloved and mortal charioteer fall before their very eyes; then, they were helpless to save him and now they are helpless to move on. Therefore, their poetic gestures here result from the truth they have just witnessed: that is, the death of their beloved Patroklos. Additionally, they see him fallen, stripped of his armor, caught in a tug-of-war between the two warring sides, and they know the man they loved is being apparently forgotten—is going unmourned, even if only momentarily—and that he will not soon enough have the grave or burial he deserves. To help compensate for this lack, for this truth that they see, the horses take matters into their own hands and refuse to move, becoming the grave. Their poetic gestures are their response to seeing truth, undeniably underscoring the connection between an intrinsic poetic capacity and seeing truth.

8. That Epistemological Thread

Thus, it appears that running through all of these concerns relating to language and the poetic space in the context of *The Iliad* is a common thread tied closely to the theme of epistemology. According to the OED, epistemology is defined as

the theory of knowledge and understanding, esp. with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion; (as a count noun) a particular theory of knowledge and understanding.³⁶

That is, epistemology is essentially the study of where knowledge comes from. Indeed the seeking and exploring of these origins and wellsprings of knowledge is an integral component of the poet's purpose in creating *The Iliad* and as such is of especial concern to our own study as well. Moreover, rooted as it is in the Greek, taken from the Greek word *episteme*, meaning knowledge, it makes sense for our examination of a Greek text to be anchored in the very word that conveys all of the nuances and gestures related to knowledge and how to discern it. The nature of our study has revealed itself to be intricately concerned with truth. The idea of knowledge and how we know it underlies each of the points we have made. Truly, the core of knowledge and the study of it is at the core of the poetic space and thus also our study of it.

9. Conclusion

Hence, we could continue to so examine these poetic moments of *The Iliad*, further demarcating the poetic space and deepening our understanding of the art of poetry and how it works within and without the pages of the poem. However, we leave off on such a focused study for now, letting these present thoughts and ideas inform our reading of *The Iliad* (and all poetry). Through the speeches of figures semi-divine, divine, and mortal, and through the varying forms of language, similes and the like, we have seen the poet carefully and consciously wield language to reveal the poetic space: an intermediary place between the divine and mortal realms wherein gods and humans interact, commune, access and experience truth. We have used this study of *The Iliad* in conjunction with the work and ideas of countless thinkers writing in the centuries since this foundational Western text to enhance and refine our understanding of poetry and how it functions as an art in this epic poem. In our exploration we experienced the raw art of the poetry *The Iliad* and witnessed anew poetry's power to create the poetic space through language. And through all of our findings we learned something about knowledge and how we can possibly know it. On winged words we find the purpose of the poet in creating the poetic space in and through the pages of *The Iliad*.

10. Acknowledgement

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 - 15 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry." in *Towards the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry 1800-1950*, ed. M. Kwansy (Middletown: Weleyan U, 2004), 54.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, 54.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, 72.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 73.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 72.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, I.359.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, I.348-350.
 - 22 Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 16.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, 16.
 - 24 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), I.408-412.
 - 25 Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 16.
 - 26 Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 17.
 - 27 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), I.363.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, I.365.
 - 29 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), I.391-392.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, IX.318-322.
 - 31 *Ibid.*, I.393
 - 32 *Ibid.*, I.573-583.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, XVII.426-440.
 - 34 *Ibid.*, XVII.434-435.
 - 35 *Ibid.*, XVII.432-433.
 - 36 "Epistemology." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.carthage.edu/view/Entry/63546?redirectedFrom=epistemology#eid>.

12. Endnote

a. While Apollo may not have been officially deemed "god of the sun" at the time *The Iliad* was composed, we conduct our close reading with acknowledgement to these sun nuances. Indeed, we might argue that the poet sees

the beams in Apollo already that others would not have recognized until later, even informing and encouraging such a comparison. Moreover, in our reading, we see the text as a living work; as such, it is influenced and shaped by our own changing understanding, even responding to every reading. Each reader brings a unique perspective to the poetic space, and we do not ignore that; rather, we use the context of our own understandings to enrich the text before us.