

***Praxis Hermeneutika***

***A Study in the Obscuring of the Divine:  
Mists and Clouds in Homer's Iliad.***

by  
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I. THE HISTORY OF A PROBLEM

It is a daunting task to challenge intellectual traditions in the Academe. To rethink, even in the most modest fashion, the great texts of our western intellectual heritage would seem at once to bring into question the ongoing appropriateness and/or correctness of the interpretive traditions accompanying those texts, and, even more arrogantly and unforgiveably, tantamount to casting an interrogating glance into the integrity of the philosophical assumptions weaving their web behind the various hermeneutical methodologies.

The first step in extracting significance from an historical text is to lay-out [*aus-legen*] the text, to listen first to its original voice, and then in a second, perhaps more pedagogical step, to interpret the text in and to different cultural circumstances. The question of history, or History,<sup>1</sup> certainly encloses a methodological tension, which reveals itself not so much in the practical examination of specific texts, but rather in the general philosophical assumptions the historical hermeneut brings with him to the text. This speculative *Ausgangspunkt*, “which already sanctions prior to any actual historical consideration a philosophical distinction between acceptable (rational) and unacceptable (ir-rational) experiences of the world, shall also actively influence the process of historical re-membering, and thus History itself as the final product of that process.” (Aiken 1997:412)

Now although it may certainly become an element of a later hermeneutical *Ausgangspunkt*, an historical inference is initially *a posteriori* in nature, for it derives from a corpus of evidence. A philosophical premise, on the other hand, which the hermeneut brings with him to the text, is per force *a priori*. Yet in practice philosophical premises seem inevitably to stand alone in determining the confines of intellectually plausible experiences of the world, and such premises will of course

also, and necessarily, govern the spectrum of possible, *i.e.*, intellectually plausible, experiences of the world of past-time. Methodologically, however, the philosophical approach to the *Auslegung* of history is not without problems; “[f]or ... there are no indisputable guidelines that allow the historian methodologically to go behind a documented experience of the world, an experience recorded in an otherwise authentic historical text, in order to determine what the author of the text could have *in fact* experienced.” (Aiken 1997:403)

Finally, one can indeed justify to some extent the general rationalist *parti pris* of the modern hermeneut on the grounds that it conforms not only to the pervasive rationalist *Zeitgeist* of the modern period, but also, and more importantly, to his (apparently) inclusively rational experience of the world. This is precisely the type of argument that Rudolf Bultmann (1967:16; cf. Aiken 9/1991:239) will advance in defense of his theory of historical *Entmythologisierung*, when he defines the conflict between “*das mythische Weltbild einer vergangenen Zeit*,” which he calls ‘*sinnlos*’ and ‘*unmöglich*’ for the modern man, and the *Weltbild* of the modern scholar that, he says, has been formed through “*wissenschaftliches Denken*”.

### *Extracting significance from Texts of History*

Inquiries into the link between philosophical assumptions and interpretive results are not novel. Many intellectuals have addressed this point. Herbert Butterfield (1965:31) made the rather caustic assertion that “The study of the past with one eye... upon the present is the source of all sins and sophistries in history.” Alfred North Whitehead (1946:283) has written:

Theory dictates method, and [...] any particular method is only applicable to theories of one correlate species. [...] This close relation of theory to method partly arises from the fact that the relevance of evidence depends on the theory which is dominating the discussion. This fact is the reason why dominant theories are also termed ‘working hypotheses’.

And elsewhere (1948:11) that “Every philosophy is tinged with the colouring of some secret imaginative background, which never emerges explicitly into its trains of reasoning.” In his ground-breaking *Sein und Zeit*, Martin Heidegger (1977:200) writes:

Die Auslegung von Etwas als Etwas wird wesentlich durch Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff fundiert. Auslegung ist nie ein voraussetzungsloses Erfassen eines Vorgegebenen. Wenn sich die besondere Konkretion der Auslegung im Sinne der exakten Textinterpretation gern auf das beruft, was “dasteht”, so ist das, was zunächst “dasteht”, nichts anderes als die selbstverständliche, undiskutierte Vormeinung des Auslegers, die notwendig in jedem

Auslegungsansatz liegt als das, was mit Auslegung überhaupt schon "gesetzt", das heißt in Vorhabe, Vorsicht, Vorgriff vorgegeben ist.

Likewise, Paul Ricoeur (1983:210) writes in *Temps et Récit*: “Veut-on enfin dire que l'histoire ne peut s'affranchir de préjugés collectifs ou personnels ? Mais c'est un truisme d'affirmer que les idéaux de recherche sont causalement reliés à d'autres traits culturels, sociaux, politiques, etc. Ce qui est significatif, c'est que les préjugés puissent être détectés et soumis à investigation.”

Oddly enough, however, notwithstanding this formidable tradition of studying, analyzing and critiquing the link between the interpreter's philosophical Worldview and his Reading of the text upon which he has centered his attentions, there yet seems to exist a fine line of what is considered intellectually acceptable scholarship around and over which only the reckless and feckless may stray. Thus, for example, in some French philosophical circles Heidegger is accused of being *fantaisiste* when he proposes to read the Greek *alhqeia* as *a-lhqeia*, which henceforth for Heidegger (1931/2, 1940: 221; 1939:299; cf. 1946:332-333 and 1949:361-365) will carry with it all the Greek mytho-poetic fullness of the Er-ring soul stepping out of Lethes, the river of forgetfulness, and casting itself once again into the full light of Being or There-ness. The classic illustration of intellectual iconoclasm, of course, is that of Heinrich Schliemann, the famous/infamous discoverer of Troy. In Benesch's commentary in Heinrich Schliemann's *Die Goldschätze der Antike* (1978:9), he says of Schliemann that he,

[f]indet die Legendenstadt Troja, von der nur er weiß, daß sie erreichbar ist, da sein Wissen der Glaube ist. Und er findet sie genau dort, wo die gesamte Wissenschaft seiner Zeit sie nicht haben will. Die Gegner sehen ihn ganz anders. Sie sehen in ihm einen Schwätzer, der an die Märchen seiner Kindheit glaubt, einen laienhaften Schatzgräber, gierig nach Gold, der ohne Sachkenntnis ans Werk geht und mit seinem in Schäßigen Geschäften zusammengerafften Geld sich das Privileg erkaufte, der Wissenschaft nur Schaden zuzufügen.

C. W. Ceram (1951:59)<sup>2</sup> describes the difficulties facing the iconoclastic Schliemann as he set to work in direct opposition to the European scholarly consensus of the 1860s-1870s concerning Homer studies.<sup>3</sup> Schliemann, he says, “[hat] Troja gefunden, indem er der Meinung aller Gelehrten entgegenarbeitete, auf nichts pochend als auf seinen Homer...” And it is precisely because Schliemann trusted his Homer that he was considered a dilettante (Ceram, 1951:66) by the scientific community: because of his clearly childlike belief in the historical and geographical reality of Homer's *Iliad*.

In the historical tradition of the western scholarly community, it has generally been the case that even to consider fleetingly, let alone to frame questions concerning “true” geography or “true” history in terms of the Homeric texts, is to incur instant and lasting ridicule; for the scholarly community still looks upon Homer's "world" with condescension and indulgence. \*On a positive note, however, the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1974:236), at least acknowledges the difficulty relative to the academe's profound disdain for what it considers mythic history: “De quelque manière qu'on envisage les mythes, ils semblent se réduire tous à un jeu gratuit, ou à une forme grossière de spéculation philosophique. Pour comprendre ce qu'est un mythe, n'avons-nous donc le choix qu'entre la platitude et le sophisme?”\* Walter Otto (1954:4), in his study on the Homeric gods, describes this situation in the following terms:

[The Homeric Age] is the period where belief in the gods was maintained with the liveliest conviction; and it is precisely here that conceptions of the divine have so little capacity to touch the heart of modern man directly that many critics have denied them any religious content whatever. [...] Consider Homer, who is the prime object of the charge. We admire not only the art of his poems but also the richness and depth and grandeur of this thought. Who could think of attributing superficial views on cosmic issues to a work which can still thrill us after nearly three thousand years? And yet upon his belief in gods we bestow an indulgent smile at best, or we explain him as a primitive-as if in a world so spiritually mature a primitive belief would not be the greatest paradox of all.

Otto (*Ibid.*) concludes his interesting criticism by reminding us of a fundamental rule of hermeneutics, one that is too often disdained by modern interpreters of ancient texts: "One may truly wonder at the assurance with which judgment is passed upon a nation's most inspired ideas on matters of supreme import without testing whether the position assumed produces valid insights into an alien realm of thought."

The Homeric texts have enjoyed surprisingly consistent interpretive treatment from modern scholarship. That the emphasis must remain squarely on the idea that the scholarship in question is modern, is obvious. For it is a New Thing. The Christianizing philosophers of the early Church, unwilling to treat the Greek religious Worldview so dismissively as we moderns, admitted the truth of the Greek Cosmology, and simply subsumed<sup>4</sup> their many gods and reframed them in the Christian Cosmology, which, at the end of the day, was not so very different. Thus, Maximus of Tyre, in the late second century, in an attempt to explain Socrates' divine guidance, will recast the Homeric gods, by which, he argues, “Homer had meant divine powers, the *daimones* which accompany virtuous people.”<sup>5</sup> The Christian Church, building on the familiar foundation of Homer and Plato, is in effect establishing a familiar, and hence credible ground for its teaching of

“ministering spirits” of which the NT speaks in Hebrews 1:14. In a more universally inclusive statement, Robin Lane Fox (*Ibid.* 326), simply states that “Paganism was reclassified as a demonic system.” In later Christian writings, as well, Paul, to cite only one instance (I Corinthians 10:20-21), will accuse the Gentiles of sacrificing to demons. And miscellaneous Church Fathers will certainly ground their Christian explanations of and apologies for gods and demons in terms of the Greek Cosmology. Among these will be Justin Martyr (*The First Apology*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, Chap. XXV, p. 171), Tatian (*Address to the Greeks*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, Chaps. VIIb-VIIIa, & IX, pp. 68-69), and most famously, of course, the great Christian intellectual Origen (*Against Celsus*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, Bk 8.28, p. 649).

Among more modern scholars, who have dismissed the Greek philosophical Cosmology in favor of the modern Enlightenment philosophical Cosmology, Henri Bergson (1982:110-111, cf. 112-113, 137, and esp. 207), will argue for an essentially *ratio*-literary approach to history when he argues that phenomena such as epic poetry and mythology do not derive from an interaction with actual historical happening, but are rather the fruit of a developing primitive imagination.

Le problème que nous posions et qui est de savoir comment des superstitions absurdes ont pu et peuvent encore gouverner la vie d'êtres raisonnables, subsiste donc tout entier. [...] Les représentations qui engendrent des superstitions ont pour caractère commun d'être fantasmatiques. La psychologie les rapporte à une faculté générale, l'imagination. Sous la même rubrique elle classera d'ailleurs les découvertes et les inventions de la science, les réalisations de l'art. [...] C'est uniquement pour la commodité du langage, et pour la raison toute négative que ces diverses opérations ne sont ni perception, ni mémoire, ni travail logique de l'esprit. Convenons alors de mettre à part les représentations fantasmatiques, et appelons "fabulation" ou "fiction" l'acte qui les fait surgir.

Similarly, but even more explicitly, the French Latinist Paul Veyne (1983:77; cf. 27), expresses the *ratio*-literary position of modern hermeneutics. The process of moving from myth to history, he argues, is simply the process of correcting errors of believability. Yet Veyne never sets forth clear methodological criteria, based either on the texts themselves or on a philosophically articulated and grounded hermeneutic, to enable the modern interpreter to distinguish with certitude the believable from the unbelievable in historical past-time.

Pour passer du mythe à l'histoire, il suffira donc de rectifier des erreurs, qui sont souvent de simples confusions de mots. Les Centaures dont parlent les poètes sont impossibles, car, si des êtres hybrides avaient existé, il y en aurait encore aujourd'hui ; un instant de réflexion permet de voir d'où est sortie la légende : pour tuer des taureaux sauvages, quelq'un inventa de monter à cheval et les percer d'un javelot (kentô). Dédale ne fabriqua pas non plus de statues vivantes et mouvantes, mais il eut un style plus souple et vivant que ses rivaux. Pélops n'eut jamais de chevaux ailés, mais il avait un vaisseau sur lequel étaient peints des

chevaux ailés. ( ... ) Athéna et Apollon ont mis la main au supplice de Marsyas, et Apollon a réellement aimé Hyacinthe, mais il serait puéril de croire que ce dieu a écrit le nom de son éromène sur les pétales d'une fleur ; la vérité est qu'Apollon s'est borné à donner cette fleur le nom du bel adolescent.

Even Walter Otto (1954: 7), who advances a thrice grounded hermeneutic, which seeks for amplification and clarification in the three domains of experience, history, and anthropology, leaves himself open to the charge of constructing if not a *ratio*-literary hermeneutic, then at least a hermeneutical framework indexed on an Enlightenment Cosmology . For Otto never openly addresses the question of whether the “experience” he has in mind is that of the modern hermeneuts in their modern world, which they in turn impose upon types of possible experience in the ancient world, or whether, in fact, he is speaking of the experience of the ancient writers in their ancient world as that experience may be abstracted from a synthesis of their own texts. Yet this point makes all the difference in the world to the outcome of the hermeneutical activity. In matter of fact, there is little or no evidence the interpreter may actually obtain from the ancient texts themselves that would tilt the scales in favor of a rationalized filtering of Greek History.

Kitto (1965:44, 47) is undoubtedly correct in asserting that the "first and the greatest of European poets" does not employ mere "literary contrivance" in the *Iliad*; for Homer's poem is, incontrovertibly, literary *tekne*. Just the simple use of hexameter verse, for instance, clearly indicates that Homer is intentionally<sup>6</sup> constructing a linguistic form, which means that this Homeric *mythos* is neither purposely philosophical nor historical nor theological either in nature or in design, but advisedly literary. This formal conclusion notwithstanding, however, and at the risk of sounding Schliemannesque, I would suggest that, in fact, Homer's poetic *tekne* encompasses more than just a simple progression of linguistic elements and literary devices. For Lamberton (1989:24) rightly argues that "there is a world of difference between deliberate poetic allegory and the interpretation 'as' allegory of existing poetry". Furthermore, the orientation of Lamberton's (1989: viii) study of Homer, which "[was not] concerned with religious thought as such, but rather with a single phase of the history of the interaction of the Homeric poems with Greek ideas concerning the nature of reality and the divine," would seem *eo ipso* to give credence to the historico-theological study of Homer. So while Homer's *Iliad* is an undeniable instance of literary activity, the meaning-full content floating just under its surface of expression and metaphor would seem to be the stuff of history and theology.

Texts of any type, because they are inevitable although perhaps not necessarily intended filters of the various levels of a particular civilization's conceptions and *Erfahrungen* of the world, are *ipso facto* reflections of time-gone-by. Interestingly enough, however, it is impossible reasonably and systematically to sustain the argument that texts of remote history are in fact a *refraction* of rather than a *reflection* of past-time.<sup>7</sup> This would be, to borrow the language of Umberto Eco (1986:2), both “a misunderstanding of method and an inexplicable warping of historical perspective.” For in such an argument of negative logic, which is certainly implied by the concept of historical refraction or warping, the historian would have already to know what *actually* happened in past-time in order to maintain that the writer, *e.g.*, Homer, twisted or refracted the “real” historical happening into an inaccurate or hyperbolic literary happening. So to read text uniquely as deliberate fictive creation is to read only for a very narrow type of possible significance, while to read text, additionally, as a picture or reflection of a piece of the historical past allows documents of past-time to speak again in the fullest possible sense.

## 2. PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS, FRAMEWORKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The unavoidable prelude to extracting significance from text is first to establish a methodology that holds the most promise for allowing text to echo reliably the original voice of its author.

Subsequently, when the modern reader of the past applies this methodology in his reading of text, it enables him to re-capture the same intonations that most likely resonated from that text for the original listener-readers. I have argued elsewhere (Aiken, 1997:405) that

The inquiry into History and the historical is a process of sifting through the testimony of the past, not only in order to discover what in fact took place, but also to prioritize the spectrum of meanings inseparably woven into the contextual fiber of past-time happenings. The hermeneutical activity is an attempt to reconstitute methodically a cultural milieu now past, now remote and unfamiliar; it is an activity of re-membering the various pieces and bits of past-time into a re-semblance of their original existential cast, a re-semblance that truth-fully and meaning-fully reflects a time in the world's past that has since become *light*.

If this is in fact the case, then the most tenable response to queries concerning whether or not, or in what manner, the reader-come-lately can actually believe what is contained in any given historical text, such as we shall see in our examination of Homer's *Iliad*, is to consider whatever clear statements (not to say arguments) are contained in the text, and hence, to respond with what, such as

in this instance, Homer, and through him the thoroughly Homerized Greeks, seem to think about divine interference in the human dimension.

This hermeneutical process reveals itself especially significant in the reading of those passages in the text where Homer is, as it were, caught unawares, which is to say, where he is in fact making theologically significant statements although he is perhaps not necessarily intending<sup>8</sup> to depict a theologically charged situation. Otto (1954:16) would seem to confirm this when he says that "[t]he divine, presented with such clarity in the Homeric poems, is manifold in form and yet everywhere consistent..." And yet, despite the evidence he gives to the contrary, Otto (*Ibid.*) insists on maintaining that "[i]t is not the purpose of the poems to communicate any religious revelation, to give force to any religious doctrine." This type of interpretative inconsistency, however, may not be applied uniformly to all of Greek literature; and if, as Otto contends, one may not speak with absolute certitude of Homer, at least the tragedians gainsay Otto's contention. For they very clearly and purposefully target theological quandaries as the quintessential tragic core of human reality.

So Otto notwithstanding: while we may not conclude with syllogistic formality that a study of Greek texts must yield information that is necessarily theologically rich *by design*, which is to say, according to the *intentio auctoris*; the realities of the greater "text", which must incorporate the *intentio opere* as well as the *intentio lectoris*,<sup>9</sup> necessarily oblige the reader-come-lately to attempt to sort out and to re-member any 'by-the-way' type of theological<sup>10</sup> information, or religious details that would seem to have 'just' slipped into the text by habit of the author's life experience, into a coherent, greater *Transient Text*<sup>11</sup> of a probable Greek world view.

From this rapid overview of authors old & new who have struggled with this question of how to "read" ancient texts, it is clear that a primary focus of hermeneutical activity over the centuries has been to make *rational* sense, *i.e.*, a rationalism derived from that of Voltaire and Gibbon, of an historical record that clearly alludes to certain types of life experiences, *e.g.*, experiences with gods, daemons, monsters, *et al*,<sup>12</sup> as if those experiences were not only phenomenologically true, but more importantly, historically true. They were not simple fictions. Yet such concepts or entities do not fit comfortably into our present experience of the world, interpreted in terms of Enlightenment rationalism, except precisely as simple fictions. There are two reasonable explanations for this: either the experience of the world is conform to what it has always been, in which case earlier historical documents are simply fictions, no matter what they might pretend. Or, the reader-come-lately's experience of the world belongs only to his world, and the record of the past is conform to different experiences of the past-world, but not necessarily representative of our

experiences of the modern world. It is this author's general contention that the clear disjunction between the reader-come-lately's personal experience of the world, and the types of experiences "recorded" in the historical record, points to a shift in the human experience of the phenomenal world. It is reasonable enough to conclude, then, that at the point where the 'legendary' (from the modern Enlightenment perspective at least) experience of the phenomenal world ceases, 'religious' tradition is born.<sup>13</sup>

A comparative study of the literatures both in Greece and the surrounding cultures, does not sanction a definitive rationalist conclusion that Homer never necessarily actually experienced himself, in 750-700 BCE, the type of happenings he assumes to be familiar and plausible to his listeners. Furthermore, as a relatively normative experience of the world, there is much textual evidence to suggest that the type of commonplace divine intervention recorded by Homer in his stories, seems to have become only a thing of memory by at least 5th century Greece. As early as Socrates, for example, the experience of the gods seems to have already become a matter of historical record, or religiosity, otherwise Plato would not have had Socrates argue in the *Republic*: "if the gods do not exist at all or if they do not intervene in the affairs of this world, why should we bother to try to escape [from their sight]? And if they exist and if they care about the things of this world, we have no idea and no knowledge of their existence except by hear-say and by the poet who have recorded their genealogy" (1974: 365e).<sup>14</sup>

So, if we do not "read" the various Greek texts as fictions, then we may reasonably conclude that those texts clearly indicate that a shift in the experience of the world must have occurred. And while the documents make clear that the experience-- and not just the perception-- of the world must have changed in fact, the memories and *mythoi* of such experiences, which were handed down by the fathers and the fathers' fathers, cast the form for the beginnings of an, as it were, 'religious' habit of mind (to modify an expression from Charles Sanders Pierce<sup>15</sup>) or familiarity or tradition.

Methodical scholarship requires that the theoretical assumptions concerning acceptable forms of History and the Truth of History, which constitute the initial foundation of any historical theory or methodology, be continually sounded and probed to ensure that they remain both textually and critically justifiable. This is precisely the intent of this paper: To present textual information suggestive of an alternative, non-rationalist response to the question of whether or not Homer's Greek audience could have conceived of the divine interventions recorded in the *Iliad* as something more than just poetic embellishment or literary artifice. The text of the *Iliad* suggests an

unequivocally affirmative response to this question. For the type of universe reflected in Homer's *Iliad* is quite consistently and neatly partitioned: The gods clearly control and manipulate the dimension of human phenomenality and perception through the consistent, diverse use of mists and clouds. This usage of clouds and mists, however, is certainly not exclusively; there are also the common instances of ordinary language use.

*Praxis Hermeneutika*

***Mists and Clouds in Homer's Iliad.***

In Book I of the *Iliad*, as a way of practically illustrating the theoretical argument of this paper, let us ask how exactly Homer intends his audience to receive the story that Athena could actually have appeared to Achilles, yanking him back by the hair to keep him from killing Agamemnon, and yet remain unnoticed by those many others immediately present and surrounding Achilles and Agamemnon? It would certainly seem, after all, that the yanking around of Achilles by a goddess would have the obvious and conspicuous physiological consequences. And when Achilles turned around and spoke to Athena, recognizing that it was a goddess who had pulled his hair, how is it that those surrounding him did not notice that he was talking to himself, seemingly, (or perhaps soliloquizing to the universe at large?) in the arcane idiom of 'winged words' (*Iliad* 1:199-205)? The text would seem to indicate that Athena was apparent only to Achilles, and to none of those surrounding Achilles and Agamemnon in their dispute.

Secondly, beyond asking how Homer intended *his* audience to understand this story, how should the scholar of the modern Cosmology respond to Homer's story? Could it ever be historically believable to anyone at any time in our history that Athena could actually have appeared to Achilles, yanking him back by the hair to keep him from killing Agamemnon, and yet remain unnoticed by those many others immediately present and surrounding Achilles and Agamemnon (*Iliad* 1:193-200)? There is, of course, a response to this question of the rationalist order, which is philosophically committed to the rule of Palaephatus -- *viz.* "seul est possible historiquement ce qui est possible encore aujourd'hui."<sup>16</sup> This response would be to suggest that Homer is, in reality, 'portraying'<sup>17</sup> Achilles struggling with the 'divine' in himself, or with his 'conscience', or with some 'higher principle' (*e.g.*, the authority inherent to the kingship of Agamemnon), thus, that Homer &/or Co. is plainly engaged in artistic activity, and that reading this particular passage from Book I,

or even the entire poem, for any kind of meaningful historico-theological insight is hermeneutically unwarranted.<sup>18</sup>

A much more interesting response, however, would be to look at Homer's rather curious story as an indication of how Greeks understood the gods to communicate with mortals. This text could very well suggest, for example, because Homer makes no reference either to clouds or mists in the passage, that the gods also disposed of various modes whereby they might selectively appear to their favorites. Perhaps the richest narrative relevant to clouds and mists in the *Iliad*, is suggested by an encounter that happened to Diomedes in Book 5 (lines 353ff.), where Homer tells us of an occasion where Athena temporarily empowered Diomedes with heightened perception. This empowering was intended to enable Diomedes to distinguish the mortal adversary from the immortal adversary in the fighting, thus allowing him to avoid or disengage a chance encounter with a god. The example of Diomedes in Book 5 presents, by analogy, a very adequate explanation for why Achilles, in Book 1, was alone in his perception of the goddess: a similar type of apperceptual de-[mist]ification may have been behind the 'enlightenment' of both Achilles and Diomedes. This conclusion seems all the more reasonable when one considers that the same goddess, Athena, was involved in both instances. So while the obfuscating advantages of mists and clouds may have been preferred by the Greek gods, this function clearly was not their exclusive function in the Greek world.

#### *Natural and Metaphorical References to Mists and Clouds.*

The first category of references to mists and clouds in the *Iliad* has no especial bearing, either positively or negatively, on the thesis of this paper. These of course are the references to mists and clouds either as common natural phenomena, *e.g.*, a moving cloud [*nepfos*] (4:275), the morning mist [*eeroeidea* sitting on the ocean (23:744), and a day without cloud [*nepfos*] (17:372), or as clear literary metaphor, *e.g.*, a cloud [*nepfos*] of birds (17:755) or a cloud [*nepfos*] of dust (23:366). Surprisingly, however, there are actually very few references in the *Iliad* to clouds or mists as purely natural phenomena (primarily *nephele* (15:20, 15:192 (?), 16:298 (?), 17:594 (?)), although also *nepfos* (4:275, 17:372), *eeroeidea* (23:744), and *eeroenta* (12:240 (?))<sup>19</sup>).

The general term for cloud, *viz.*, *nepfos* (see 4:234, 4:275, 16:66, 16:364, 17:243, 17:755, 23:133, 23:366), is also used in clearly metaphorical expressions, *e.g.*, a cloud of foot-soldiers (4:274) or a cloud of war (17:243), except in the expression 'a cloud of sorrow' (17:591, 18:22), in which instance *nephele* is used.

*Ambiguity and Hermeneutical Assumption.*

Even among this first group of apparently commonplace or ordinary language references of mists and clouds, however, the allusions are not always entirely or unequivocally natural. It is precisely this type of equivocal allusion in Greek literature, in fact, designated by a question-mark sign (?) in this text, which has enabled many interpreters of ancient history to postulate a theory of primitive 'religiosity,' which, at least according to their theory, naively sees an expression of the divine<sup>20</sup> in natural phenomena, *e.g.*, clouds forming together on the mountain. This belief has also had an impact on biblical scholarship. For example, in his analysis of the religious climate of the biblical period, Friedman (1987:35) reasons that pagan religion "was close to nature," which is a rather bland kind of statement, but then he speaks of the Hebrew god, El, who, he says, "[u]nlike the other major god of the region (Haddu)... was not identified with any particular force in nature". This interpretative approach is substantiated by Robinson (1944:157):

A further aspect of the heavenly council ... is that it provides a cosmic background to the lives of men upon the earth ... [...] At a time when there was a growing emphasis on [God's] transcendence, this idea helped to maintain a living relation to God. Certainly 'the forces of Nature', divorced from contact with God, are no compensation for the loss of the council of Yahweh. The myriad agencies through which God controls our lives may be more personal than we ordinarily suppose.

Likewise, in their introduction to the translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gardner & Maier (1984:17) state: "The high gods in the Sumerian and Akkadian pantheon are as much the invention of the poets as of any of the forces<sup>21</sup> that act on the development of religious institutions."

Walter Otto, of course, in his classic text *The Homeric Gods*, puts a much more sensible (sensibility of the Enlightenment sort), and certainly less condescending scholarly twist on the question of how to understand rationally the divine. Says Otto (1954:6-7):

There has never been a religion in which the miraculous, in the literal sense of transcending the natural order, has played so slight a role as in the ancient Greek. [...] In Homer, of course, nothing happens without the god concerned manifesting himself. But despite this remarkable proximity of the divine, everything takes its natural course. [...] In all larger forms and conditions of life and existence the Greek perceived the eternal visage of divinity. [...] In their world the divine is not superimposed as a sovereign power over natural events; it is revealed in the forms of the natural, as their very essence and being. For other peoples miracles take place; but a greater miracle takes place in the spirit of the Greek, for he is capable of so regarding the objects of daily experience that they can display the awesome lineaments of the divine without losing a whit of their natural reality.

*References to Dark Mists, Misty Tartaros, and the Mist-Walkers.*

A second category of references to mists and clouds in the *Iliad*, while certainly supportive in general of a less rationalistic reading of the text, still does not explicitly substantiate the thesis of this paper. Namely, that as far as Homer's Greek audience was concerned, it was not only plausible, but commonplace, for gods to participate actively in the phenomenal world without necessarily being subject to the normal human *Bedingungen* of phenomenality, and thus to human apperception. The principal references in this category are of course to the mist that closes around the one who is about to die, *axlus* being used three times in this way (5:696, 16:344, 20:421), *nephos* once (16:350), and *nephele* once (20:417). There are also, however, three references in this category to the dusky gloom of Hades [*eeroentes/a*] (8:13, 21:56, 23:51), and two references to the Erines (Daughters of Night<sup>22</sup>) as Mist-Walkers [*Eerophoitis*] (9:571, 19:87).

*The Use of Clouds to Veil the Heavenly Places.*

The third category of mists and clouds in the *Iliad* unquestionably substantiates the thesis of this paper, so much the more because this category consists primarily of passages significant by inadvertence. This 'by-the-way' quality of certain types of textual information enormously increases the plausibility of this paper's argument, because it is obvious from the context of the different passages in question that Homer is not purposely seeking either to depict a cosmology of the Greek world, although this certainly occurs tangentially, or to address issues of specific or especial theological significance to his Greek audience. The references in this category are to gods using clouds to keep Olympus isolated and hidden from the common human dimension.

The two most interesting references in this category are almost identical in the Greek text, simply occurring in different places, and describe first the passage of Hera, then of Hera and Athena, through the gates of heaven, whose guard was consigned to the Hours. "To [the Hours] great Ouranos [*megas ouranos*] has entrusted the gates and Olympus,<sup>23</sup> both to roll away (*anaklinai* evokes the image of opening up a trap door) a thick cloud [*nephos*] and to push it back over again [*epitheinai*]" (*Iliad* 5:750-751, cf. 8:394-395).

Although both passages are quasi identical in language, in the second instance Homer furnishes the additional detail that Hera and Athena are stopped by Iris at the foremost [*protesin*] gates of Olympus (8:411-412). Logistically then, Hera is still within the domain of the gods in 5:751: she is looking for Zeus on Olympus, and finds him "removed from the other gods sitting on the most extreme summit of craggy Olympus" (5:753-754); but the passage makes clear that

without actually leaving the confines of Olympus, Hera has in fact already gone through the gates hidden by the cloud and guarded by the Hours. This is also the case in 8:395ff., but in this latter passage Homer furnishes the reader with an additional piece of information: Hera and Athena have already passed through the cloud-bedecked gates guarded by the Hours, but they have yet to go through a second set of gates, the foremost gates of Olympus, which, suggests the logic of the text, will take them out of Olympus altogether.

Another passage that corroborates the idea that Olympus is shielded or protected by cloud-cover is found in 13:521-525. Zeus has forbidden the gods to intervene in the fighting between the Greeks and Trojans. So Ares, who had been especially active in the fighting up to this point, has been constrained to the inactive role of a spectator, which is precisely how Homer depicts him: as "sitting on the extreme summit of Olympus under golden clouds [*nepheisin*]" (13:523). In this passage, however, one need not necessarily see the *nepheisin* as instruments for divine cloaking. It is also certainly possible that the term simply refers to common clouds that would have naturally gathered around the rocky heights of Olympus. So while this particular passage does nothing more, textually, than portray an Olympus surrounded by (apparently) natural clouds, it nevertheless lends con-textual support to the general contention of this paper. Namely, that Homer's Greek audience was quite familiar with the idea that cloud-cover around Olympus was not necessarily just a deployment of natural weather forces, but that it was also, and more significantly, a shield purposely employed to separate the divine habitat from the lower, earthly regions.

In another interesting passage in this category, 14:286-288, Homer relates a meeting between Hypnos and Hera in which Hypnos has allowed himself to be persuaded by Hera to collaborate in a scheme to divert Zeus' attention from the Trojans. At this point in the poem, the Trojans, with the support of Zeus, were in the process of overwhelming the embattled Greeks. Homer has revealed, however, that even the outspoken champion of the Greek cause, Hera, Zeus' consort, has not understood the farsighted Bould of Zeus; for Zeus is also actively working, albeit obliquely, for final Greek victory over the Trojans.

Zeus' Bould, which, almost inexplicably given the clarity of the text, remains a mystery even for the other gods (cf. esp. 8:200ff., 10:45, 14:265-266, 15:45-46), was to stir up Achilles by empowering the Trojans until they broke through the Greek wall and reached the ships (cf. 8:470-477, 15:58-67, 231-235, 567, 593ff.). The death of Patroklos and, even more specifically, the place where Patroklos needs to die, is an essential element of Zeus' plan. Zeus strips the courage from Hektor (16:655-656), and Patroklos drives the Trojans out of the Greek camp and back to the

walls of their city (16:644ff.). Apollo strikes Patroklos treacherously from behind (16:790), which allows Hektor to slay him easily. Zeus clears away the mist from the Greeks in order to make sure the news of Patroklos' death gets to Achilles, Achilles reenters the battle, Hektor dies, and Troy ultimately falls ... all according to Zeus' plan.

Because even Hera has misconstrued the intention of Zeus, however, she sets about to counter Zeus' apparent pro-Trojan projects, and recruits Hypnos in a scheme to shift the tide of the fighting in favor of the Greeks. Hypnos, however, has some initial misgivings due to his prior experience with her machinations, so he makes Hera swear and take an inviolable oath that her scheme is going to work and that he will not suffer any repercussions at the hands of Zeus. This accomplished, the two of them leave Lemnos for Ida where they expect to find Zeus. At this point in the text Homer says that Hypnos, to avoid being seen by Zeus, "went up into the tallest pine tree, which, having become the largest at that time on Ida, went through the mist [*eros*] and reached the aether [*aither*]" (14:287-288).

Both logistical and linguistic considerations clearly indicate that the mist referred to in this text, which separates the Olympian aether from the lower atmosphere, is not the same mist or cloud used to dissimulate the inside gates of Olympus. This passage, then, provides a clear example of a second sort of mist, deployed either naturally or intentionally, which apportions the earthly realm, where the largest pine tree on Ida has its roots, from the Olympian realm. Another possible reading of this passage is to understand *eros* as simply referring to the sky or lower atmosphere, thus translating: "...the tallest pine tree, which, having become the largest at that time on Ida, went through the sky and reached [up to] the aether." The general argument of this paper, however, better supports the reading that *eros* refers to a cushion or layer of mist separating the lower sky from the Olympian aether.

A final reference to the use of mists and clouds as a means of secluding and veiling the earthy domain from the heavenly domain, is found in 17:593-596. In this passage Homer describes how at one point Zeus, observing the progress of the war from Ida, catches up the aegis in order to strike fear into the Greeks and give victory to the Trojans. As he was about to intercede in the fighting between the Greeks and the Trojans, however, just before releasing his thunderbolt and the flash of lightning from the summits of Ida, Homer says that Zeus covered the mountain in mists [*nephepsi*]. To what purpose, Homer does not expressly state; but again, it is irrelevant whether or not one sees in this passage a reference to a supposed Greek primitive religion or superstition. The text still clearly confirms that Homer's Greek audience was familiar with a Zeus-- whose domain is

the clouds [*nephele*] (15:192)-- who, perhaps to render his interventions more grandiose and formidable, used mists to surround and cloak himself and his immediate vicinity.

*Various Uses of Mists and Clouds Among the Gods.*

In the *Iliad* the gods deploy mists and clouds predominantly to shroud or to cloak. Perhaps the most revealing and forceful example of this is when Diomedes, seconded in his efforts by Athena, wounds Ares. Homer says that the wounded Ares flees to safety, "going together with clouds [*nephelein*] up to wide heaven" and rapidly arriving at the abode of the gods (5:867). In a straight-forward reading of this text, Ares wraps himself in a mass of clouds both to conceal himself and, quite possibly, to protect himself from another attack. A further inference of the passage, however, might also be that Ares relies on clouds as a form of transit between Olympus and earth.

According to the text of the *Iliad*, the Greek gods would quite commonly shroud themselves in clouds [*nebe*] or mists [*nephelein*] when traveling (see 14:282, 5:867). There are two references in the *Iliad* to the fact that the deities, in one instance Hera (5:776) and in the other Zeus (8:50), close a mist about their horses when traveling. They also obscure themselves when trying to avoid the curious or indiscreet gazes of other immortals (see 20:150), but also and especially when they wished to go among mortals without being perceived (see 17:551, 15:308?). Although in certain passages, such as 15:308 and 17:593-596, the gods (and sometimes even divinely empowered mortals; cf. 5:186) are not necessarily hiding themselves when they cover themselves with mist or cloud. Rather, they are, as it were, increasing or aggrandizing their stature in order to induce terror in those around them.<sup>24</sup>

In Book 5, for example, which is commonly referred to as the Aristeia of Diomedes, Athena lifts away the mist [*axlun*] from Diomedes' eyes in order that he might distinguish between gods and mortals in the fighting (5:127ff.). An unembellished reading of this passage suggests that mortals are hampered in their dealings with the gods by what seems to be an obscurity of vision caused by a (physical? apperceptual? cognitive?) mist. And it is only when the mist is lifted by a deity that a completely unimpaired state of perception is actuated, making it possible for mortals to recognize the presence of gods in the natural realm.<sup>25</sup> In the *Iliad*, it must be remembered, Homer depicts, among other things, the quintessential tragedy of the Greek world, which is not that men and nations do battle against each other, but rather, that men cannot know for certain when their opponent is in fact just an 'ordinary' adversary, and neither a man protected by a god (cf. esp. 5:185-187 and 12:450), nor, in a worst-case scenario, a rampaging god disguising himself in the

form of a man (cf. 13:355-357 and 14:135ff.). The significance of this reading is certainly not lost on the significantly later (5th century) neo-platonic philosopher Olympiodorus who writes, in *Platonis Phaedonem Commentaria* (4.13 - 4.14):

kaiì oi, poihtaiì de/ fasi [E 127-128] periù tou= Diomh/douj

oÀti "a)xlu\ n d' a)p' o)fqalmw½n eÀlen, hÁ priìn e)ph=en, oÃfr' euÅ ginw¯skoi". ei¹mh\ ga\r eÃtuxe th=j ¹Aqhna=j, ou)k aÄn e(w¯ra ti a)kribe/j.

In Book 5, which is really very revealing in terms of the interest and involvement of the gods in the Trojan conflict, Diomedes receives from Athena both divinely heightened perception, as well as her strict injunction to abstain from engaging any of the gods, except Aphrodite, in combat (5:353ff.). Athena's de-[mist]ification of Diomedes' perception was intended to be strictly defensive in nature. It enabled Diomedes to identify his adversary as either mortal or immortal, thus allowing him, should he find himself matched against a deity, to avoid or disengage a confrontation, except if he should encounter Aphrodite. The text relates that Diomedes does in fact wound Aphrodite in battle, and that the goddess, leaving the fighting, flees for help to Ares, whom she finds "sitting with his swift horses to the left of the fighting, his spear leaned into the mist [*eeri*]" (5:355-356).

This passage reveals two interesting pieces of information. First, when Aphrodite was wounded, Ares was not active in the fighting but a by-standing spectator conveniently bedecked, along with his horses, in an obscuring mist. Yet despite Ares' shroud of mist, Aphrodite, whose vision could obviously pierce the obscurity, knew exactly where he was on the sideline of the battle and ran to him for protection. A second piece of information, of course, is Homer's more general description of gods as spectators, which is a common thread running throughout the *Iliad*. In fact, as Homer depicts the gods, their primary interest in the mortal sphere is often limited to the arena of the heroic *agonia* (cf., among others, 11:73-83, 13:10-16). The stunning example of this watchful attitude, of course, is Achilles, a hero of such magnitude and stature that his deeds attracted the attention and admiration of the gods.

Certainly the most charming and courtly of all the uses for mists and clouds in the *Iliad* occurs in 14:340-351 where Zeus, succumbing to the charms of his wife, Hera, draws a golden cloud [*nephos*] about them so thick that, he gallantly assures her, neither mortal nor god, "nor even Helios could look at us through it, although his light is commonly held to be more penetrating than all others" (14:343-344). The Homeric gods use mists to becloud gallantry, with the obvious proprieties and conveniences that this use reflects.

Still another practice (?) among the gods seems to be almost ornamental or ritualistic in nature. In one rather hermetic reference, Homer speaks of "an incense laden cloud [*nephos*] wreathed around Zeus like a crown" (15:153), and in another passage, Athena almost ritually wreaths a golden cloud [*nephos*] like a crown around Achilles' head (18:205), as if in a ceremony of honor. This might arguably be construed as at least a partial fulfillment of the promise of honor that was given to Achilles in 1:352-354.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Use of Mists and Clouds to Obscure Human Perception.*

In this final category of mists and clouds in the *Iliad*, perhaps the most obvious references are to the gods' use of mists and clouds to lift heroes out of the perilous fray of battle, to cover and protect the bodies of fallen heroes, or simply pour *fausser le jeu*: to obscure or deceive for their own ends the perceptions of individuals and armies. In the *Iliad* it is actually quite commonplace for the gods to extricate their favorites from dangerous or life-threatening situations by veiling them in heavy mist. When Paris was in danger of death, Aphrodite "caught him up most easily, since she was a god, and concealed him in heavy mist [*eeeri*]" (3:380-381). Shortly after saving Paris, Aphrodite was once again in the process of packing off one of her favorites, Ainaios, when she was charged and wounded by Diomedes. Pressed by his attack, Aphrodite unceremoniously dropped her charge, thus forcing Apollo *in extremis* to snatch up Ainaios "in a murky mist [*nephele*]" (5:343-345). Such occurrences are neither unusual nor new in the telling with Homer, for Nestor also tells the tale of a time in his youth when he would have killed the young Moliones had not Poseidon "rescued them from the battle by shrouding them in a dense mist [*eeeri*]" (11:750-752). Similarly, in Book 20 Achilles has finally come back into the fighting, and the battle rages between himself/Athena and Hektor/Apollo. In fact, Homer says that Achilles became so fierce and menacing in his attack against Hektor that Apollo "caught Hektor up most easily, since he was a god, and concealed him in heavy mist [*eeeri*]" (20:444). Apollo will later repeat this performance, once again frustrating Achilles of his prey, when he saves Agenor from the onslaught of the greatest of the Achaians by surrounding him in dense mist [*eeeri*] (21:597, cf. 21:549).

There are also several passages in the *Iliad* where Homer portrays the gods using mists and clouds to shield the bodies of certain heroes slain in combat. For example, when fighting broke out over the body of Patroklos, Homer says the day was obscured by "a mist [*eeeri*] ... descending upon that part of the battle where the most intrepid stood about the fallen son of Menoitios" (17:368-369, cf. 17:376). In an analogous passage Zeus uses night [*nukti*] to shield the body of his fallen son,

Sarpedon (16:567-568). Similarly, when Hektor's slain body was still laying on the plains of Troy, "at that place Phoibos Apollo brought down an obscuring cloud [*nephos*] with him from the sky to the plain, and shrouded all the space where the body was laying" (23:188-190).

Perhaps the most interesting references to mists and clouds in the *Iliad*, which are also, unquestionably, the most pertinent to the thesis of this paper, are those passages showing the Greek gods using mists and clouds to prevent mortals from 'seeing' --knowing? perceiving? --what the gods wished to conceal. Certain passages even suggest that, at a most basic level, there is a mist (veil?) naturally obscuring the mortal perception of the divine, and that this mist makes mortals and immortals an indistinguishable quantity as far as natural, *i.e.*, veiled, human perception can judge. In Greek literature, of course, the obscurity clouding the gods as they intervene in the arena of human events assumes quite tragic proportions, whence the intensity and poignancy of the 5th century Greek tragedies. For in terms of power and knowledge, the gods of antiquity had the clear advantage over simple humans, and, if the texts of the Greeks are to be believed, actually inventively worked toward their ruin.

It is a recurrent theme of Greek literature, and very particularly of the *Iliad*, that human perception is [mist]fied when it attempts to focus on the gods. Thus, moments of lucidity or de-[mist]ification in the text become that much more hermeneutically significant, not only because they reflect Homer's, and his audience's, conviction that they, the Greeks, were totally muddled in their perceptions of the divine, but also because such passages clearly expose at least one mode of divine intervention familiar to the readers and listeners of the Greek world.

The first of several instances of de-[mist]ification in the *Iliad* occurs in Book 5 when Athena lifts the mist [*axlun*] from Diomedes' eyes in order that he might distinguish the mortal from the immortal (5:127-128). The second instance, which again comes at the hands of Athena, occurs in Book 15 when Nestor rallies the Greeks to stand up against the Trojans and not to loose heart. "So speaking, Nestor roused the ardor and heart of each one; and from their eyes Athena began pushing the immortal cloud of mist [*nephos axluos thespesion*], and the light came out from both sides directly toward them... and they perceived [*phrassanto*]..." (15:66-671). In a third occurrence, in Book 17, the Greeks are hard-pressed by the Trojans, and Telamonian Aias is complaining that, because of a mist [*eeri*], he cannot see whether or not a messenger has been dispatched to Achilles with the news of the death of Patroklos. So Aias makes a prayer to Zeus: "rescue the sons of the Achaians from the mist [*eeros*] and make a clear sky, and make our eyes see" (17:645-646), which Zeus answers by scattering the mist [*eera*] and loosening the fog [*omiklen*] (17:649), thereby

enabling Menelaos to see whether Antilochos, who is to act as messenger to Achilles, is in fact still alive.

Perhaps the most relevant occurrence of fog [*omiklen*] in the context of this paper is in 17:643-646. Other occurrences include the metaphorical foggy cloud of dust (13:336), and a natural reference to the wind scattering the fog (3:10). There is also, however, the reference to Thetis coming to Achilles, "emerging from the gray ocean like fog" (1:359).

The final instance of de-[mist]ification is found in Book 20 of the *Iliad*. Ainaios has pitted himself against Achilles in a combat that must inevitably end in Ainaios' death, because Achilles is "both stronger ... and better loved by the immortals" (20:334). To save Ainaios' life Poseidon interferes in the fighting, drifting a mist [*axlun*] across Achilleus' eyes, and it is only after Ainaios has been lifted out of danger that Poseidon disperses the mist [*axlun*] obscuring Achilles' perception (20: 321-350).

There are only four instances recorded in the *Iliad* where the gods de-[mist]ify humans. In two cases this is done by Athena, the first time to the specific profit of Diomedes (5:127-128), although Athena also takes advantage of Diomedes' amplified perception to attack Ares; the second time to the general advantage of the Greeks, that they might clearly perceive and hence correctly appraise their situation (15:667-671). In the third instance it is Zeus who disperses the mist surrounding the Greeks in order both to ensure that Aias and Menelaos see Antilochos, who carries the message of Patroklos' death to Achilles, and that Achilles should finally reenter the fighting, thus accomplishing Zeus' plan. In the last occurrence it is Poseidon who uses *axlun* to [mist]ify Achilles in order to save Ainaios. Quite in keeping with the tragic order of things in the rapport between the Greeks and their gods, however, Homer offsets the four instances of de-[mist]ification in the *Iliad* with five cases in which the gods use mists and clouds to deliberately and disadvantageously [mist]ify.

The first indication in the text of a general association between mists and the human perception of the divine, is once again the reference found in the Aristeia of Diomedes (5:127-128). This particular passage is significant not so much because it reveals the gods' use of mists and clouds as occasional or deliberate, but rather, because it seems to suggest that a mortal's normative perception of immortals in the Greek world is at best [mist]ical. In Homeric reflections of the Greek world, immortals perceive clearly while mortals perceive only darkly—much to their disadvantage. Of the remaining instances in the *Iliad* where gods use mists to cloud an issue, there is one instance of divine treachery (16:790), two instances where mists and clouds are used to obscure the

perceptions of an individual or an army (17:269, 20:321), and one instance of a god using mist to prevent the flight of the Trojans before an onslaught (21:6ff.).

In a first occurrence of divine [mist]ification, in 16:790, Apollo breaks Patroklos' attack against the Trojans by concealing himself in mist [*eeri*], sneaking up unperceived behind Patroklos, and striking him in the back causing his armor to come undone. Unprotected and supremely disadvantaged, Patroklos is then killed by Hektor; but Zeus, both to protect the body of the hero and to obscure the Trojan perception of those Greeks who had stayed to defend the body, "poured out a close mist [*eera*] around the glittering helmets of the Achaians" (17:269-270), thus effectively concealing or [mist]ifying the Greeks and Patroklos' body from the Trojan fighters. In a second instance of [mist]ification, in 20:321-346, Poseidon obscures Achilles with a mist because he has been pressing down too furiously upon Ainaios. According to the text, Poseidon pours out a mist [*axlun*] on Achilles, who suspects nothing, purloins Ainaios from the destiny awaiting him at the hands of the greatest of the Achaians, and then disperses the mist. In Homer's telling, it is only after the mist has finally been dispersed that Achilles actually finds himself truly mi/ystified. "What is this! this wonder I see with my own eyes? A spear lays here on the ground, but I do not see at all the man whom I was charging fiercely to destroy" (20:344-346).

In the final reference of this category Achilles is chasing down a group of Trojans who splinter, some running across the plain toward the city, and some throwing themselves in the divine river Xanthos. At this juncture, in an illustration of solidarity with the Greek cause, Hera causes a deep mist [*eera*] to fall around those Trojans fleeing toward the city in order to contain their flight, thus allowing Achilles to continue his pursuit and massacre of those who have fled into the water (21:6-7).

### *The Obscuring of the Divine.*

The initial practical question brought up in this paper was whether or not it was really plausible to Homer's Greek audience that Athena should appear to Achilles in a crowd of people, yank on his hair to prevent him from killing Agamemnon, and yet remain imperceptible to those surrounding Achilles and Agamemnon (1:193-200). The procedure used to investigate this question has been to query the text itself concerning possible responses. This process corresponds, in fact, to the basically inescapable methodology of the historical inquiry: in the com-position<sup>27</sup> of History it is first necessary to consider exhaustively and attentively the historical structure framed in and

suggested by the documents of history, before retreating into a problematic philosophical re-construction of the possible *other* meanings of those documents.

Does the text of Homer's *Iliad* contain information that might be useful in answering the central question of this paper? The response is clearly affirmative. The *Iliad* depicts immortals using mists and clouds (1) to set off their habitation from the earthly realm, (2) to obscure themselves when they travel or simply wish to go unseen, and (3) to protect or harm mortals as they will by obscuring the moral perception of the divine. The information provided by the *Iliad* clearly reflects a time in history during which people really believed in such things as gods who were actively and physically involved in the fighting between nations and peoples, and where specific divine interventions could in fact take place in the presence of large groups of people without anyone — even sometimes those directly targeted— noticing the presence of gods in their midst. All these things were in fact plausible both to the Poet and to his audience. In the question of 1:193-200, then, the text of the *Iliad* clearly supports the thesis that Homer's Greek audience did not perceive as extraordinary either the reality of a goddess, or that the goddess should be present among a group of people without anyone, except in this case Achilles, being aware of her.

The specific practical focus of this essay has been to answer the question posed in 1:193-200 by analyzing the various uses of mists and clouds in the *Iliad*. One of the difficulties in 1:193-200, however, is precisely that Athena was physically perceptible only to Achilles, or rather hidden from the other Greeks, apparently without the use of mist or clouds, for Homer makes no specific mention of either mist or cloud in this passage. Based on the general information gathered in this study, three possible solutions to this difficulty recommend themselves. First, it is entirely possible that in this passage Homer simply does not include the detail that Athena is in fact wrapped in mist. If the general text of the *Iliad* is to be believed, Homer's audience is quite cognizant of the conventional [mist]ical methods and means used by gods in their commerce with the mortal realm. A second possible solution to the dilemma —albeit *ex silentio* in form— is also warranted and plausible. Although the text clearly indicates that the Homeric gods have a proclivity for using mists and clouds for diverse ends, there is no information to suggest that they do not also have other means and tools of phenomenal manipulation at their disposal. Hence, there is nothing that prohibits drawing the inference from 1:193-200 that the Homeric gods also dispose of the tool of 'selective countenancing,' *i.e.*, that they have the ability, without mists and clouds, of showing their face to whom they will. Finally, another possible explanation of Achilles' singular perception in 1:193-200

has already been suggested, at least analogically, by the enlightening/demistification of Diomedes in 5:127-8.

The Palaephatic response to 1:193-200, which of course follows the rationalist interpretive framework of modern scholarship in general, is that Homer is engaged in strictly literary activity, that he is using literary metaphor to 'portray' Achilles struggling with the divine in himself, or with his conscience, or with some 'higher principle.' This is Nilsson's (1956:161) approach:

Another rationalistic explanation of the presence of the gods and of certain of their actions is the cloud or darkness which is always at hand when a god wishes to appear among men or to help and save one of his favorites. The gods sit upon the wall of Troy and descend to the fight hidden in a cloud. They withdraw heroes from the contest by wrapping them in a mist; Athena covers Odysseus in the same way when he walks into the town of the Phaeacians, and also when he returns to Ithaca. Apollo protects Hektor's body with a mist. When a cloud lies spread over Olympus and when Zeus on Ida sits enthroned upon a cloud we have a reminiscence of visible Nature. At a later stage the cloud becomes a means of making invisible, resembling the helmet of Hades, the magic hat of our popular belief, and it is probably a rationalistic adaptation of this old popular idea. It is significant of the desire to visualize things that the cloud finally becomes a garment which the gods cast over their shoulders. The outstanding instance is that of Ares turning aside from the fight and sitting in a cloud against which he has leaned his spear. The converse notion of a cloud or darkness covering a person's eyes and preventing him from seeing seldom occurs.

This response gains its acceptance from the modern philosophical or Cartesian 'experience' of the divine, *i.e.*, of God/a god as an epistemological and not as an onto-metaphysical phenomenon. After all, the gods of the modern era are little more than weightless icons, symbols, philosophical concepts, or literary metaphors. The text of the *Iliad*, however, does not support the idea that Homer is engaged only in literary activity. In fact, the world Homer depicts in the *Iliad* is a reflection of the type of [mist]jical world in which he lived, a world that saw, sometimes, but felt, always, the heavy hand of the divine.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The subtler distinctions between historical hermeneutics and philosophical hermeneutics, history and History, are more fully addressed in this author's "Hermeneia. An Anatomy of History and Ab-wesenheit" (IL: Open Court, Library of Living Philosophers, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> For the clearest statements in Ceram regarding Schliemann's difficulties with the scientific community, see Ceram, 47 & 53.

<sup>3</sup> See Nilsson (1933:2-19) for a *compte rendu* of the traditional positionings in Homeric research. Nietzsche (1964, 1:17) formulates the 'Homerfrage' in the following fashion: "Es entsteht also die Aufgabe, das Individuelle zu fassen und es wohl zu unterscheiden von dem was im Flusse der mündlichen Tradition gewissermaßen angeschwemmt worden ist -- ein als höchst beträchtlich geltender Bestandteil der Homerischen Dichtungen." Among non-philologists, Bloom's (1994:4) politically correct formulation attests to the current state of the question in the Humanities: "Homer, a person or persons lost in the dark recesses of time." H.D.F. Kitto (1965:44), on a dismissive note, reduces the question-argument to an absurdity: "On the famous Homeric Question, who Homer was and how much of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* he wrote, I propose to say as little as possible. We can see how vague the Greek tradition was from the fact that one early Ionian writer, Hellanicus, placed him in the twelfth century, and Herodotus in the ninth..."

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Franz Cumont's argument that the Persian theological and cosmological schema, in the form of Mithraism, was subsumed into that of the 2nd century A.D. Roman Empire. *The Mystery of Mithra* (NY: Dover, 1956), among other references: 30ff, 81, 89ff.

<sup>5</sup> Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 129.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Danto (1981:175): "I think it an analytical truth that rhetoric itself is an intentional activity ... If true, this implies an important relationship between work and artist. That is, there is an implicit reference to the fact that someone is trying to move one rhetorically to the extent that one responds ... to the work."

<sup>7</sup> This idea of historical reflection versus historical refraction is further developed in my Thèse de Doctorat d'État *La Croyance comme préjugé herméneutique*, (University of Nice, 1995), 155.

<sup>8</sup> Danto (*op. cit.*): "'Intentional' does not necessarily entail 'conscious,' of course, and there may be room for a theory of interpretation that refers art to the unconscious of the artist without this in any way changing the conceptual relationships between art and its intentions."

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<sup>9</sup> This language follows standard scholastic hermeneutics. Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 53ff.

<sup>10</sup> Compare Lamberton (1989: vii): "The Homeric poems provide our earliest direct insights into the religious thought of the Greeks..."

<sup>11</sup> This language comes from my paper Hermeneia: An Anatomy of History and Ab-Wesenheit, in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (IL: Open Court, Library of Living Philosophers, 1997, 406). "Ultimately, then, the inquiry into past-time derives from historical man's search for beginnings; it springs from his drive to discover in the *transient text* of change, and to articulate, his own mythos."

<sup>12</sup> Cf. David Aiken, History, Truth, and the Rational Mind. Why it is Impossible to Take Myth Out of History (*Theologische Zeitschrift*, 9/1991), *passim*, but esp. p. 232, 238.

<sup>13</sup> This argument is more fully developed in this author's article History, Truth, and the Rational Mind. Why it is Impossible to Take Myth Out of History (*Theologische Zeitschrift*, 9/1991).

<sup>14</sup> For Socrates on this question, see Diogenes Laertes, IX, 51.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce, The Fixation of Belief*, pp. 8-9 (published in Popular Science Monthly, 1877).

<sup>16</sup> "La doctrine actuelle des choses" ou "la règle de Palaiphatis". This language is from Paul VEYNE (1983:26 & 76-78, 81-84).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Lamberton (1989, 20) for an illustration of the tendency toward allegory, or the dichotomizing between *saying* and *meaning*.

<sup>18</sup> Raaflaub is typical in this respect: "Homer is not a historian, and [...] intensive discussions ... have been going on over many decades now, trying to define what he really is and how we can best understand his poetry. To wipe all this off the table as being "literary" simply will not do." From: Dr. Kurt Raaflaub, then editor of *Historia* (University of Tübingen) letter to the author, August 1993. Likewise, Professor George Kennedy, editor of the *American Journal of Philology*, returned a 1992 version of this article with a note saying: "I regret that [this article] does not seem suitable for acceptance. We have rather a large backlog of material on early Greek poetry."

<sup>19</sup> In 12:240, *eeroenta* is perhaps a vernacular reference to crepuscule, although reason would dictate that a slang reference should appear more than just one time in the text of the *Iliad*. Hektor is arguing against Poulydamas' interpretation of bird portents, saying that whether birds fly on the right against the dawn or on the left when it is 'dusky as hell' or 'hellishly dusky,' his desire and will is still to attack the Greek wall.

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Roy Kenneth Hack's *God in Greek Philosophy to the Time of Socrates*, Princeton University Press, 1931.

<sup>21</sup> Authors Note: The context of the quote makes clear that the authors are principally referring to the forces of nature.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 211-222.

<sup>23</sup> For a similar personification of Olympus, see *Theogony* 680, 842, and *Aspis* 466, 471.

<sup>24</sup>This interpretative tradition clearly carries on into the Medieval period (circa 350 A.D.). See Qunitus Smyrnaeus' *The Fall of Troy* (Trans: A.S. Way; Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1913), Book III, lns. 65-75, in Online Medieval and Classical Library Release #18b; electronic edition edited, proofed, and prepared by Douglas B. Killings (DeTroyes@EnterAct.COM), August 1996.

"Thus Phoebus spake to his indignant soul:  
"Out on this man! he is sense-bereft! But now  
Not Zeus himself nor any other Power  
Shall save this madman who defies the Gods!"

*From mortal sight he vanished into cloud,  
And cloaked with mist [emphasis mine] a baleful shaft he shot  
Which leapt to Achilles' ankle:"*

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Lambertson (1989) 2, note 3.

<sup>26</sup> For a comparative study of wreaths and garlands and crowns in Near Eastern texts, see Roland de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 214.

<sup>27</sup> According to Thucydides, History is a com-position or com-pilation [*syg-grapho*, see *Hist.* 1:1 1 1, 2:70 4 8, 2:103 2 3, 3:25 2 5, 3:88 4 4, 3:116 3 3, 4:51 1 6, 4:104 4 5, 4:135 2 2, 5:41 3 4, 6:7 4 5, 6:93 4 6, 7:18 4 7, 8:6 5 7, 8:60 3 7] of deeds and events around a specific thesis. Likewise, Herodotus com-poses [*syg-grapho*, see 3:103; 4:14] his histories, "lest the things done by men should be blotted out of memory by time, lest the great and marvelous deeds wrought by both Greeks and foreigners should become without glory, and especially in order to show the cause for which they warred with one another" (I:1,3).

I have written in an essay on Hans Gadamer (1997:411) that, "In the broadest sense every document is historical in nature; but the Greek historians specifically intended so to position events in respect to one another [*sug-grapho*] that an especial emphasis concerning the meaning of historical happenings would become evident."