

Flowers of Commemoration: Ancient Interpretations of the Death of Young Men in the *Iliad*

A) *Odyssey* 8.521-531: The renowned singer sang these things. But Odysseus melted, and wet the cheeks below his eyelids with a tear. As when a woman laments, falling over the body of her dear husband who fell before his city and people, attempting to ward off the pitiless day for his city and children, and she, seeing him dying and gasping, falling around him wails with piercing cries, but men from behind beating her back and shoulders with their spears force her to be a slave and have toil and misery, and with the most pitiful grief her cheeks waste away, so Odysseus shed a pitiful tear beneath his brows.

B) *Iliad* 9.323-327: Like a bird that brings food to her fledgling young in her bill, whenever she finds any, even if she herself fares poorly, so I passed many sleepless nights, and spent many bloody days in battle, contending with men for the sake of their wives.

C) *Iliad* 11.389-396: I don't care—it's as if a woman or senseless child struck me. The arrow of a worthless coward is blunt. But when I wound a man it is far otherwise. Even if I just graze his skin, the arrow is piercing, and quickly renders the man lifeless. His wife tears both her cheeks in grief and his children are fatherless, while he, reddening the earth with his blood, rots, and vultures, not women, surround him.

D) *Iliad* 6.405-432:

(I) Andromache stood near to him, shedding a tear,
and she reached toward him with her hand and spoke a word and
addressed him:

"*daimonios* one, your own spirit will destroy you, neither do you pity
your infant son nor me, ill-fated, I who will soon be
your widow. For soon the Achaeans will kill you,
making an attack all together. It would be better for me
to plunge into the earth if I lost you. For no longer will there be any
comfort once you have met your fate,
but grief.

(II) Nor are my father and mistress mother still alive.
For indeed brilliant Achilles killed my father,
and he utterly sacked the well-inhabited city of the Cilicians,
high-gated Thebe. And he slew Eëtion,
but he did not strip him, for in this respect at least he felt reverence in his *thumos*,
but rather he burned his body together with his well-wrought armor,
and built a funeral mound over him. And mountain nymphs,
the daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, planted elms around him.
I had seven brothers in the palace;
all of them went to Hades on the same day.

For brilliant swift-footed Achilles killed all of them
among their rolling-gaited cattle and gleaming white sheep.
But my mother, who was queen under wooded Plakos,
he led here together with other possessions
and then released her after taking countless ransom,
and Artemis who pours down arrows struck her down in the halls of her father.

(III) Hektor, you are my father and mistress mother,
you are my brother, and you are my flourishing husband.
I beg you, pity me and stay here on the tower,
don't make your child an orphan and your wife a widow."

E) *Iliad* 6.494-500: So he spoke and brilliant Hektor took up his helmet of horse hair. And his dear wife went home, though frequently she turned back, shedding abundant tears. And when she quickly reached the well-inhabited house of man-slaying Hektor, and found inside her many attendants, she initiated lamentation in all of them. They lamented Hektor in his own home, although he was still alive.

F) *Iliad* 18.22-60: The women whom Achilles and Patroklos had taken captive screamed aloud for grief, beating their breasts, and with their limbs failing them for sorrow. Antilokhos bent over him the while, weeping and holding both his hands as he lay groaning for he feared that he might plunge a knife into his own throat. Then Achilles gave a loud cry and his mother heard him as she was sitting in the depths of the sea by the old man her father, whereon she screamed, and all the goddesses daughters of Nereus that dwelt at the bottom of the sea, came gathering round her... The crystal cave was filled with their multitude and they all beat their breasts while Thetis led them in their lament. "Listen," she cried, "sisters, daughters of Nereus, that you may hear the burden of my sorrows. Alas how I am wretched, alas how unluckily I was the best child bearer, since I bore a child that was faultless and strong, outstanding of heroes. And he shot up like a sapling. After nourishing him like plant on the hill of an orchard I sent him forth in the hollow ships to Ilion to fight with the Trojans. But I will not receive him again returning home to the house of Peleus."

G) *Iliad* 9.410-416: My mother the goddess Thetis of the shining feet tells me that there are two ways in which I may meet my end. If I stay here and fight around the city of Troy, my homecoming is lost, but my glory in song [*kleos*] will be unwilting: whereas if I reach home my *kleos* is lost, but my life will be long, and the outcome of death will not soon take me.

H) *Iliad* 8.302-308: The arrow hit Priam's brave son Gorgythion in the chest. His mother, fair Kastianeira, lovely as a goddess, had been married from Aisyme, and now he bowed his head as a garden poppy in full bloom when it is weighed down by showers in spring—even thus heavy bowed his head beneath the weight of his helmet.

I) *Iliad* 17.49-60: The point went straight through his soft neck. He fell with a thud, and the armor clattered on top of him. His hair was soaked with blood, and it was like the Graces [*Kharites*], as were his braids, which were tightly bound with gold and silver. Just like a flourishing sapling of an olive tree that a man nourishes in a solitary place where water gushes up in abundance, a beautiful sapling growing luxuriantly—blasts of every kind of wind shake it and it is full of white blossoms, but suddenly a wind comes together with a furious storm and uproots the tree so that it is stretched out on the ground—even so did the son of Atreus Menelaus strip the son of Panthos, Euphorbus with the ash spear, of his armor after he had slain him.

J) *Iliad* 11.218-228: Tell me now you Muses that have homes on Olympus, who was first to face Agamemnon, whether of the Trojans themselves or of their renowned allies? It was Iphidamas son of Antenor, a man both brave and of great stature, who was raised in fertile Thrace, the mother of sheep. Cisses brought him up in his own house when he was a child—Cisses, his mother's father, the man who begot beautiful-cheeked Theano. When he reached the full measure of glorious manhood, Cisses would have kept him there, and wanted to give him his daughter in marriage. But as soon as he had married he left the bridal chamber and went off to seek the *kleos* of the Achaeans with twelve ships that followed him.