Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: The Iliad by Gillian Cross, Neil Packer", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Hanna Paulouskaya. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/152. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

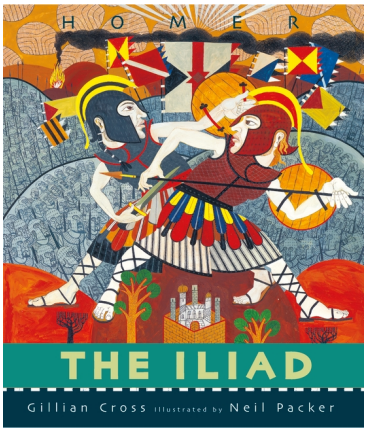
Gillian Cross , Neil Packer

The Iliad

United Kingdom (2015)

TAGS: Achilles Aeneas Agamemnon Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Artemis Asclepius Athena Cassandra Eris Gods Greek History Hector Helen Hera Hermes Homer Iliad Juno Katabasis Menelaus Minerva Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Paris (Trojan Prince) Penelope Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Underworld Zeus





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General information	
Title of the work	The Iliad
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	Gillian Cross, Neil Packer, ill., *The Iliad*. London: Walker Books Ltd., 2015, 175 pp.
ISBN	9781406314212
Genre	Adaptations, Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works, Myths, Picture books
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

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Creators



Gillian Cross , b. 1945
(Author)

Gillian Cross is a British children's author from London. She studied at Somerville College Oxford, before taking a PhD from the University of Sussex. For some years, Gillian Cross worked as a government advisor promoting public libraries. Since turning to writing, she has had considerable success with the popular *Demon Headmaster* series and has won many awards. Although not usually specialising in historical fiction, Gillian Cross' publications nonetheless include *The Odyssey* (Walker Books, 2012), *Down with the Dirty Danes!* (HarperCollins, 2000), *Brother Aelred's Feet* (HarperCollins, 2007), and *The Roman Beanfeast* (Barn Owl Books, 1997).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 3, 2018).

Twitter profile (accessed: July 3, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Neil Packer , b. 1961
(Illustrator)

Neil Packer trained at the Colchester School of Art. He worked as a graphic design before becoming a full-time freelance illustrator in the 1980s. He has done a considerable amount of work for the Folio Society. His work for tem includes illustrated volumes of Robert Graves' *I Claudius* (1994), *The Arabian Nights* (2003), Petronius'

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Satyrica (2003) and the fairy-tales of Hans Christian Andersen (2005). Neil Packer also illustrated Gillian Cross' *Odyssey* (Walker Books, 2012).

Source:

Official website (accessed: June 26, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

Gillian Cross' *The Iliad* opens with events prior to the Trojan War, starting with the three goddesses arguing over the apple. The text then moves on to a retelling of Homer's Iliad itself, before concluding with an "Afterwards" chapter relating Achilles' death, the quarrel over his armour, the wooden horse, Cassandra's insight (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.246), the fall of Troy, Diomedes' and Odysseus' post-Troy journeys, and Agamemnon's murder (see esp. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*).

This is a retelling of ancient myth with an emphasis on striking visualisation.

Analysis

This is a sensitive retelling of the *Iliad*, which makes use of Homeric imagery such as "like two wild boars," and Homeric expressions such as "smiling through tears." Some of the original direct speech is paraphrased to good effect. There is also a thoughtful reference to a boars tusk helmet, one of the legacies of the Mycenaean Age that survives in the Homeric epic (Homer, *Iliad*, 10.260-270); unfortunately, this detail has been slightly misunderstood, so that there is a reference to the tusks "decorating" a helmet rather than being made of them and the illustrator, likewise, presents the helmet as a standard hoplite helmet with large tusks affixed like Hollywood Viking horns.

The section in which the Greeks build the wall follows the *Iliad* very closely but differs from it in Zeus' response (Homer, *Iliad*, 7.430–460). In Homer's *Iliad*, Poseidon complains about the lack of offerings that accompanied the wall, and about the possibility that it will become more famous than the walls he built at Troy. Zeus dismisses this, before going on to frighten Greeks and Trojans alike with thunder, with malicious thoughts towards them. In Cross' *Iliad* (p. 45), "Zeus was not pleased when he saw the wall. He wanted the Greeks to rely on his protection, not on man-made defences." This adjustment moves the plot along with the brevity needed for an abridged version, yet it does so in a way that introduces a theological concept that is at odds with the ancient Greeks' concept of what the gods expected from them.

Cross' *Iliad* does not shy away from much of the unpalatable violence

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of the original; the night attack is included, as is Achilles' killing of Iphidamus, complete with its touching backstory. The more graphic descriptions of wounds are omitted. Sexual content is kept to a minimum or alluded to delicately, so that, for example, following Paris' dual with Menelaus, Hector seeks out Paris and berates him, but Helen speaking to Aphrodite and sleeping with Paris is cut; Cassandra's story refers to how "Apollo was in love with her," and how he cursed her "when he stopped loving her," (see Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1203ff.).

While the author has done a fine job of retelling the *Iliad*, this edition is arguably most distinctive in its illustration. The edition is heavily illustrated throughout; few double-pages go without illustration, there are many full-page illustrations, and several two-page illustrations featuring only a few words. Classical armour, clothing, and other equipment situate the events in Greek antiquity (the only exception being some Y-front underwear, p. 104). The illustrations frequently have labels and additional text in Greek script. A Greek alphabet is provided at the end of the book. Beyond that, the style of the illustration places the events in a surreal, fantastical environment. Figures are represented with a semi-grotesque hyper-realism, such as heads or limbs out of proportion, faces aged and distorted. There is extensive use of extremes of either multi-colour, or black-and-white, or silhouette, with the suggestion of the influence of shadow-puppetry at points. Architecture is presented in an angular, stylised fashion, with people appearing within the architecture out of proportion, yet in proportion with their emotional impact within the scene. There are some chilling visual details, such as collections of skulls and bones, and the frequent presence of vultures. On at least one occasion (p. 36), the vultures are labelled with the names of on-looking gods, adding a further layer of creative interpretation. Humans and deities are depicted with a range of skin tones and ethnicities. In the image with the god-vultures, the Greeks sit in lines staring out of the page at the viewer. On the one hand, this fits the context in which Hector requests a duel, placing the viewer in Hector's position; on the other, the Greeks' presentation evokes WW1 and other informal military photographs, or even sport-team photographs, bestowing poignant relatable humanity upon the ancient warriors.

This is a compelling version of *The Iliad* that makes a bold statement about the ancient epic's ability to inspire new artistic works.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aeneas Agamemnon Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Artemis Asclepius Athena Cassandra Eris Gods Greek History Hector Helen Hera Hermes Homer Iliad Juno Katabasis Menelaus Minerva Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Paris (Trojan Prince) Penelope Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Underworld Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Death Friendship Gender expectations/construction Heroism Identity Individuality Intellect Justice Morality Parents (and children) Past Relationships Society Storytelling

Further Reading

Eccleshare, Julia, *Interview with Gillian Cross (Telling Tales)*, London: Egmont UK Ltd, 1999.

Haywood, Jan and Naoise Mac Sweeney, *Homer's Iliad and the Trojan War. Dialogues on Tradition*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

The University of Chicago Library, 'The Children's Homer', part of *Homer in Print: The Transmission and Reception of Homer's Works,* available at lib.uchicago.edu (accessed: August 1, 2018).

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