Hum 110: *The Iliad*
Books 6-10
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QUESTIONS & BACKGROUND ON STRUCTURE:
In a structural analysis, a scholar studies the logic of the story's action in order to understand the causes underlying the major divisions in the work being analyzed. For example, a structural analysis of the *Iliad* might help explain (among other things) what the different sections of the book are, why the sections occur in a certain order, and why it ends as it does.

One of the most important hallmarks of western story structure is that we value (and find pleasing) plots which focus on conflict and resolution. As such, most stories contain at the very least a three part plot ("narrative") structure
- **introduction**
- **complication (conflict)**
- **resolution**

You may have seen this formula being used to discuss the structure of plays. In the nineteenth century German writer Gustav Freytag (working off of classical and later European dramas) suggested the conflict and resolution in a typical five-act play resembled a pyramid. This pyramid expands upon the three part structure given above by adding two intermediary steps:

I. Introduction
II. Complication (Rising Action)
III. Climax
IV. Falling Action
V. Denouement (Unknotting)

Although Aristotle did not formulate the rules for Greek drama using these exact terms, Freytag's pyramid is useful for explaining Aristotle's description of tragedy as something which brings about purgation (catharsis) of pity and fear. In this sense, the structure of most Greek dramas (and perhaps the oral tradition out of which they developed?) was an emotional structure, and was supposed to bring about a satisfactory emotional conclusion in which tension was relaxed. Is the *Iliad* a tragedy according to this definition?

The following are some general ways of structuring a written text (whether a novel, play, poem, history, speech, etc.--this list is adapted from Edgar Roberts' *Writing Themes About Literature*, pp. 126-31):

1. Logic: There are certain traditional structures for arguments. These arguments include: causal, definition, inductive, deductive, claims to authority, analogies, and statistical. You needn't worry about these arguments and how they are structured now, as you will be introduced to them later in the year.

2. Chronology: as you read the *Iliad* you will notice that things are not always told chronologically--people often flash back in time and predictions are made about the future. Moreover, at certain points time moves very quickly and then slows down. When do these temporal distortions occur and what do you make of them?

3. Conflicts: in addition to the larger structures of conflict and resolution given above, a narrative may be comprised of many lesser conflicts. Are these lesser conflicts parallel to any of the larger conflicts and, if so, what do we learn from the similarities and differences? As you begin to identify the central conflicts in a text you can discover many of the work's key themes; looking at the lesser conflicts will help you unravel the complexities of these themes.

4. Variations on Situations and Types: the structure of the work may also be analyzed in terms of the way an author varies a particular situations (comparable to a theme and variations structure in music--I will bring one of these to class). For example a relationship between two characters might have any one of the following attributes: lifelong success, temporary success, intermittent success and failure, progressive indifference, mutual toleration, or complete failure. What sorts of situations get repeated throughout the *Iliad* and how do these situations comment upon one another. (This is what we have discussed before as "set scenes").

5. Emotions. What emotional patterns are being invoked by the text? Is it based on either or the cathartic emotional structures given above? You might want to make a graph of your emotional responses to each book to help you visualize your analysis.