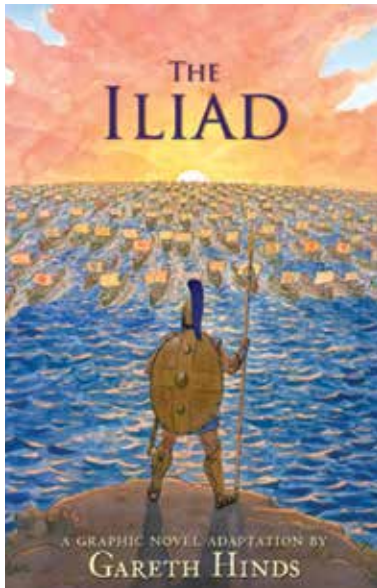


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The Iliad

Adapted by Gareth Hinds

2019

Candlewick Press

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Illustrated

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Reviewed by Dr Katrina Burge, teacher candidate, University of Melbourne

Gareth Hinds' graphic novel adaptation of *The Iliad* is a delight. Homer's famous account of the siege of Troy, ostensibly in retaliation for the abduction of Helen, has launched a thousand re-tellings, and Hinds' is a very successful one. (Note that the discussion about Homer's existence or authorship is not entered into here.)

For a generation that is used to visual information, this is an introduction to one of the classics of world literature in a format that is both useful and beautiful. It adds to his oeuvre, which also includes *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf* and some Shakespearean works.

With graphic novels, the images are inevitably dominant, and rightly so in this book. Visually it's a delight. Hinds has captured the different moods of both the characters and the landscape. For readers unfamiliar with the terrain, there is a constant visual reminder of the dusty, dirty, tedious misery of siege warfare. The characters are fully embodied through the drawings, which makes the many gory killings and despairing bereavements deeply felt for the reader.

Hinds has used clever design features to ensure they clearly convey both action and emotion. In a nice touch, Helen's famous 'face that launched a thousand ships' is always shown veiled so we can avoid engaging with whether or not we think she was worth it. Another effective technique is the monochrome rendering of the gods, with a distinct colour for each of the immortals. Film renditions of mythology have always struggled to convey the distinction between mere mortals and anthropomorphic gods, but here it is handled beautifully, with the almost ghostly colourings of the gods conveying their otherworldliness without reducing their power.

It can be hard to keep track of all the characters when reading *The Iliad*, but here there is a handy visual glossary of characters that one can refer to at any point to keep track of who's doing what to whom. Pictorial maps are also included, which is helpful in conveying just how small a setting all this action takes place in.

Of course, the format also has some limitations, as any translation of form, language or medium inevitably does. Very much like a scriptwriter transforming a novel for the screen, Hinds is faithful to the spirit of Homer but draws on five English translations

of *The Iliad* and four of *The Odyssey* to create his own adaptation of the text. As in the original, most text is dialogue, with narratorial description of events as required. Textually, the key loss is the rich metaphors (e.g. 'wine-dark sea') that are such a feature of Homer, along with the man/beast similes that provide authorial comment on behaviour. While Hinds' images carry some of this load, these are areas in which this format is not the most effective mode of communication.

This text fits into the Victorian secondary curriculum at several points. If you are teaching 'The Ancient World and Early Civilisations' to Years 7 and 8, it clearly addresses key questions (and their related descriptors) such as 'How do we know about the ancient past?', 'Which significant people, groups and ideas from this period have influenced the world today?' and 'What emerged as the defining characteristics of ancient societies?'

For those also teaching outside History, it can be key reading. Book 6 of *The Iliad* is on the text list for VCE Classical Studies, while English features Euripides' *Women of Troy*, David Malouf's *Ransom* and Margaret Attwood's *The Penelopiad*. For any of these texts, Hinds' retelling would be a quick and effective way of getting students familiar with the overall narrative before their in-depth study.

Overall, I highly recommend this book, whether for your teaching or as a way of finally encountering one of the great classics you've always been meaning to read.