

LILIAN DOHERTY (University of Maryland):
*What's Homer to Us? Recent Anglophone Reception of the Iliad and
Odyssey*

Recent Anglophone works (American, Canadian, and British) that take the Homeric epics or the Trojan cycle as their point of departure have common themes that reflect the preoccupations and discontents of our contemporary civilization. In a wide variety of media—from plays to graphic novels, from lyric poetry to short stories—they emphasize what Mikhail Bakhtin called the “centrifugal” aspects of the epics: those aspects that, rather than converging on a single unified meaning, pull the audience in a number of less normative directions. This effect is achieved in several ways: by focusing on alternative outcomes (traditional or newly invented) to that of the canonical texts; by privileging the focalization of minor characters; and by emphasizing the “realistic” aspects of the originals, i.e., their inclusion of unheroic and even disreputable details. Among the works to be discussed are *An Iliad*, a play by Lisa Peterson and Denis O’Hare; *Memorial*, a book of poetry by Alice Oswald; *The Penelopiad*, a novel by Margaret Atwood; and *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*, billed as a novel but more like a collection of short stories, by Zachary Mason.