

It can be difficult to convey in one or two English words the layers of meanings certain words carry in Greek, but they are central to perceiving the layers of meaning inherent in the poem. On one level, the poem can be read for plot and character, as any other text can be read. On another level, the poem is about, among others, the function and prominence of heroes and hero cults. Understanding the coded and underlying meanings of the Greek words can help us be alert to significant moments that might otherwise become muted or lost in translation.

Four that appear in the first stanza are **μηνιν** (menin), **Αχιλλεύς** (Akhilleas), **ψυχας** (psychas), and **ετελείετο** (eteleieto). The bolded words indicate their English translations:

*“Sing, goddess of the **anger** of **Achilles**, Peleus’ son,  
the accursed anger which brought the Achaeans countless  
agonies and hurled many mighty **shades of heroes** into Hades,  
causing them to become the prey of dogs and  
all kinds of birds; and the plan of Zeus **was fulfilled**.”*  
Iliad 1.1-5, translated by Anthony Verity

### μηνιν (menin)

In Greek, the first word in the *Iliad* is *menin*, typically translated as *rage*, *wrath*, or *anger*, as Anthony Verity’s translation above. The ancient Greeks had numerous words to describe anger-like emotions. *Menin* refers a specific kind of anger that is associated with immortals and, once invoked, is difficult to bring to an end.

### Αχιλλεύς (Akhilleas)

Typically Latinized as *Achilles*, *Akhilleas* means “grief of the people,” a compound of *akhos* (grief, sorrow, public expressions of sorrow) and *laos* (people).

### ψυχας (psychas)

Typically translated as *souls*, *spirits*, or *shades*, the *psyche* (singular of *psychas*) refers to the breath of life that animates heroes in life and carries their identities into the afterlife.

### ετελείετο (eteleieto)

A form of **τέλος** (telos) typically translated as *end*, *completion*, or *fulfillment*, *telos* does not necessarily mean a final end point but can refer to the completion of a cycle that itself recurs.

## Key Words in the Iliad

Additional terms of significance include **κλεος** (kleos), the name **Πάτροκλος** (Patroclus), and **θυμος** (thumos). Bolded passages below indicate how these words have been translated into English:

### κλεος (kleos)

Typically translated as *fame* or *glory*, kleos refers to the fame conferred on heroes through their stories being sung in epic, through their names being on people's lips, which confers on them a form of immortality. It is often paired with **ανδρων** (andron), meaning *men*, and/or **αφθιτον** (aphthiton), meaning *imperishable* and, in some contexts, possibly also *unwilting*.

*“With this [Achilles] was delighting his heart, singing **the glorious deeds of men**, and only Patroclus was with him, sitting opposite him in silence, watching for the time when Achilles should end his singing.”*  
Iliad 9.189-191

*“My mother, Thetis of the silver feet, tells me that there are two specters carrying me toward the end of death: if I remain here and fight around the city of the Trojans, I shall lose my homecoming, but **my fame will never die**, while if I go back home to my dear native land, my noble fame will be lost, but my life will be long, and the end of death will not come quickly upon me.”*

### Πάτροκλος (Patroclus)

Patroclus means “fame of the ancestors,” a compound of *patros* (fathers, ancestors) and *kleos* (fame, fame through epic song). The name Cleopatra carries the same meaning.

*“With this [Achilles] was delighting his heart, singing **the glorious deeds of men**, and only **Patroclus** was with him, sitting opposite him in silence, watching for the time when Achilles should end his singing.”*  
Iliad 9.189-191

### θυμος (thumos)

Typically translated within the epics as alternately *heart*, *mind*, or *spirit*, it can refer to the seat of consciousness, incorporating rational AND emotional thought. In the passage below, an embassy of Achaean leaders visits Achilles to entreat him to return to battle, and one urges Achilles accordingly:

*“So come, Achilles, master your great **spirit**; you should not have a pitiless heart—even the gods can be made to bend, Though their greatness and honour and power exceed our own.”*  
Iliad 9.496-7