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Use of Epithets in "The Ransom of Hector"

Like other revered and prolific poets and writers of all time, Homer has significantly used epithets to deliver his literary work entitled *The Iliad*. With a laser focus on Book 24: The Ransom of Hector, Homer used wide-ranging epithets to provide different effects on his epic poem. From a literary standpoint, all the author's epithets serve a single crucial purpose of adding texture to Homer's prose. In essence, Homer has strategically used epithets throughout "The Ransom of Hector" to help him shape the reader's literary imagination.

One instance of conspicuous use of epithets is when Homer states that "Priam wept copiously for Hector the *killer of men...*" (560). Here, Homer uses the epithet of Hector to remind the readers that Hector, whom Achilles viciously slew was also a renowned murderer of men. Thus, Homer's resolve to continually refer to Hector as a "killer" throughout the prose is an ingenious way of encouraging the readers to be acquainted with both sides. Such a creative move in literature helps the author not allow the readers to construct a straightforward or unidirectional moral from the presented literary prose. In other words, Homer seems to submit to his audience that, however good the reason for war, it ends up creating universal sorrow.

Subsequently, the author uses a fixed epithet when referring to Iris. For instance, he repeatedly says, "At first swift Iris..." and "Go then, swift Iris!" (549). By continually referring to Iris as swift of foot, Homer demonstrates a character epithet to describe Iris instantaneous in body speed. Homer uses this and other epithets to appeal to the reader through vivid description

of his main characters, such as Iris. The author should have written, “Iris was fast.” However, Homer refrains from the latter approach and opt to utilize a more colorful phrase, “Iris swift of foot” (547), to add a definite sense of style to his epic story. Similarly, Homer, through his other main character – Achilles, whom he is half-man or demigod in the prose, chooses to use character epithets such as “Achilles *like to the gods!*” (560) to signal the half-god status of Achilles.

Lastly, Homer's literary work uses unique epithets to exclusively identify certain characters besides distinguishing them from the rest throughout “The Ransom of Hector.” For example, Homer alludes to the above purpose when he repeatedly refers to Zeus as the “son of Kronos” (552).

Work Cited

Powell, Barry. "The Iliad: The Ransom of Hector". *Oxford University Press*, (2014), 544-568.

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