

Critics have accounted for the great variety of divine/mortal interactions in the *Iliad* by focusing on the nature of the gods and positing vastly different and at times contradictory explanations for their behavior (e.g. Willcock 1970; Dietrich 1983). This paper argues that the nature of mortals, specifically differences in the way that humans and half-gods perceive the divine, offers a more coherent explanation for the variety of interactions. Though able to see gods disguised as mortals, humans perceive undisguised gods in the form of disembodied voices, if at all (cf. Pucci 1998). Those mortals who are able to see and interact with the gods directly, most notably Achilles and Helen, have one important thing in common: they are not merely humans but half-gods.

The *Iliad* never explicitly states that humans and half-gods experience the gods in different ways, but two famous passages reveal an underlying distinction. In Book 1, none of the other Achaeans are able to see Athena when she appears to Achilles (cf. Achilles interaction with his mother throughout the poem, with Scamander in Book 20 and Apollo in Book 22). The poet draws attention to Helen's ability to see the gods in Book 4 when she recognizes Aphrodite's neck and chest beneath the goddess's disguise. Meanwhile, Paris, an undeniable favorite of the goddess as evidenced by her recent intervention, remains blissfully unaware of Aphrodite's presence. As in the case of Diomedes in Book 5, mere humans must be granted the power to see the gods (with the possible, but understandable, exception of the go-between, Iris). The *Iliad* depicts humans following the gods' commands and reacting to their voices (most notably their battle cries), but communication between undisguised gods and humans is one-sided, as if the recipient does not consciously perceive the god. Gods and half-gods, on the other hand, regularly interact directly with the gods who address them. This paper offers examples to illustrate the conventions of divine/mortal interactions in the *Iliad* and reevaluates some of the cases in which direct, visual interaction between gods and humans has been assumed.

Invisible gods are not the rule in early Greek epic. The Homeric hymns of Demeter and Aphrodite clearly describe visual epiphanies. Nor are unseen gods altogether unexampled in Greek literature. This tradition is reflected in Greek tragedy where Hippolytus is punished for his excessively close relationship with a goddess he has never seen (Barrett 1964: 409), the chorus of the *Bacchae* only hear the voice of Dionysus when he functions as a god (*E. Ba.* 576ff.), and Odysseus cannot see Athena in the prologue of the *Ajax*. The *Iliad* may, in fact, avoid a categorical denial of humans' ability to see gods to accommodate conflicting traditions regarding the perception of the gods in its PanHellenic audience.

This paper may change the way we envisage divine epiphanies, but it has greater implications. A poem that does not, on the surface, distinguish half-gods from humans (Hainsworth 1993: 320), but at the same time maintains a biological distinction between humans and half-gods calls for a reevaluation of the nature of half-gods and their role in the *Iliad*.