

In this paper, I discuss the problem of teaching the Homeric gods by looking at how they are represented as physical beings in the *Iliad* and in a range of comparative material, culminating in Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire (Der Himmel über Berlin)*. I present an approach that I have used in a lecture on the topic of the Homeric gods for a large, lower division Mythology course and within an upper division seminar on the Greek gods. My objective is to encourage students to compare the depictions of the gods in Homer with material and visual evidence, as well as, more generally, to elicit from the class a range of definitions concerning what a divinity is and how it can be represented. As a point of access to the Homeric material, I focus on certain problems to do with immortality in Homer – can gods die? Can they be wounded? Are they invisible? Do they age or when do they stop aging? Do their bodies tire? How do they move through space? What size are they? (Here we might move into Hesiod and the Homeric hymns as well). I want students to realize that the answers to these questions are not straightforward and that immortality is in many ways a paradoxical construct.

By asking students to imagine what the gods in the *Iliad* might look like, how they are depicted, and how they might experience physical sensations, I encourage them to understand the gods as complex beings in their own right, rather than just as foils for human beings (in other words, I try to push the students' understanding of the gods beyond the scene at the end of book 1). I start with some key passages from the *Iliad* that focus on the divine body. I then ask the students to consider these passages alongside the depiction of gods in archaic and classical sculpture. Moving to contemporary, filmed depictions of immortals, I ask students to discuss the consequences of the screenwriter's decision to cut the gods out of the movie *Troy*. The only live divinity to be depicted in *Troy* is Thetis, in a role that portrays her as aging and insubstantial. After showing this clip I turn to the depiction of angels in *Wings of Desire* (for the fact that they look down upon the city of Berlin and especially for the scene in which they discuss how pleasant it would be to engage in human actions and sensations). I also touch on the portrayal of robots and "Cylons" in science fiction film and television for their parallels with ancient notions of immortals. I use these clips as talking points for a discussion of how the *Iliad's* gods can be understood in relation to the presentation of supernatural beings in other contexts.

In terms of the paper's structure, I will start by outlining my objectives. I will then provide (on a handout and through slides and film clips) examples of the material discussed above. I will end by assessing what I have found works well in teaching the Homeric gods through this approach and what problems I have encountered in doing so.