

STUDY GUIDE

An Iliad

By Lisa Peterson & Dennis O'Hare
September 27-October 27, 2024, in the Founders Theater

Sponsored by The Caplin Foundation

Directed By David Minton



Promotional photo by Will Kerner featuring (l-r): David Minton, Jesse Timmons

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*Study Guide compiled for Live Arts by Education Director Daniel Kunkel
Dramaturgical research by AN ILIAD Dramaturg Jon Mikalson*

Plot Summary

A lone Poet wearily enters with a suitcase. They've endured an eon of traveling, reciting an age-old epic tale. AN ILIAD is a brilliant, spellbinding, modern retelling of Homer's classic, a play about war and rage, that resonates all-too-vividly today. As they talk, we listen rapt, captivated by this timeless story, filled with dark humor, cruelty and pathos, and listen to songs of heroism, loyalty and love.

Time & Setting

The time is that of the Trojan War of the 12th century B.C.E., as told by Homeric style oral poets of the 8th century B.C.E., with themes and issues in *The Iliad* reaching up to today. Famous scenes from the epic are narrated in both poetry and prose and are dramatized with dynamic action.

The two poets, in ancient garb, itinerants, tell their story in a simple setting that might be envisioned as an ancient bar, or coffee shop, or small, humble theater. The audience would know, at least in outline, the story of *The Iliad*, and *The Wrath of Achilles*, but would be most interested to see and hear how these two poets bring new creativity and personal reflections to that familiar story and how they connect it to the audience's own lives.

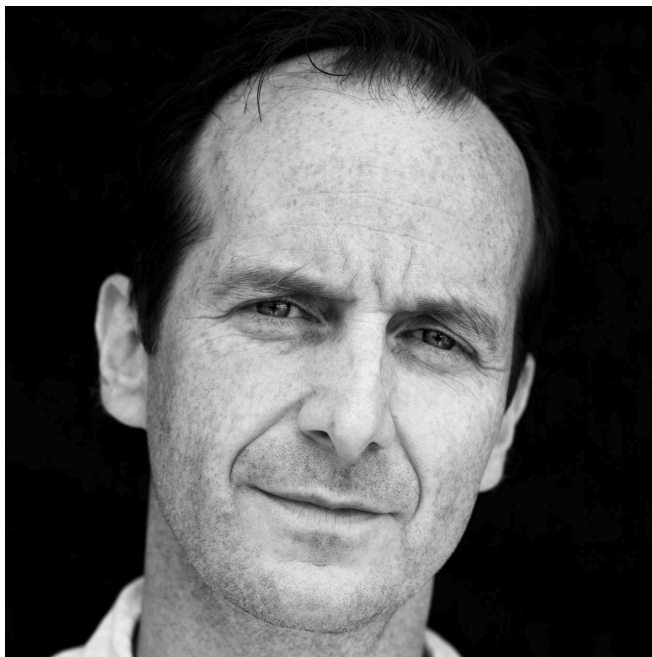
Characters

- The Elder Poet
- The Younger Poet

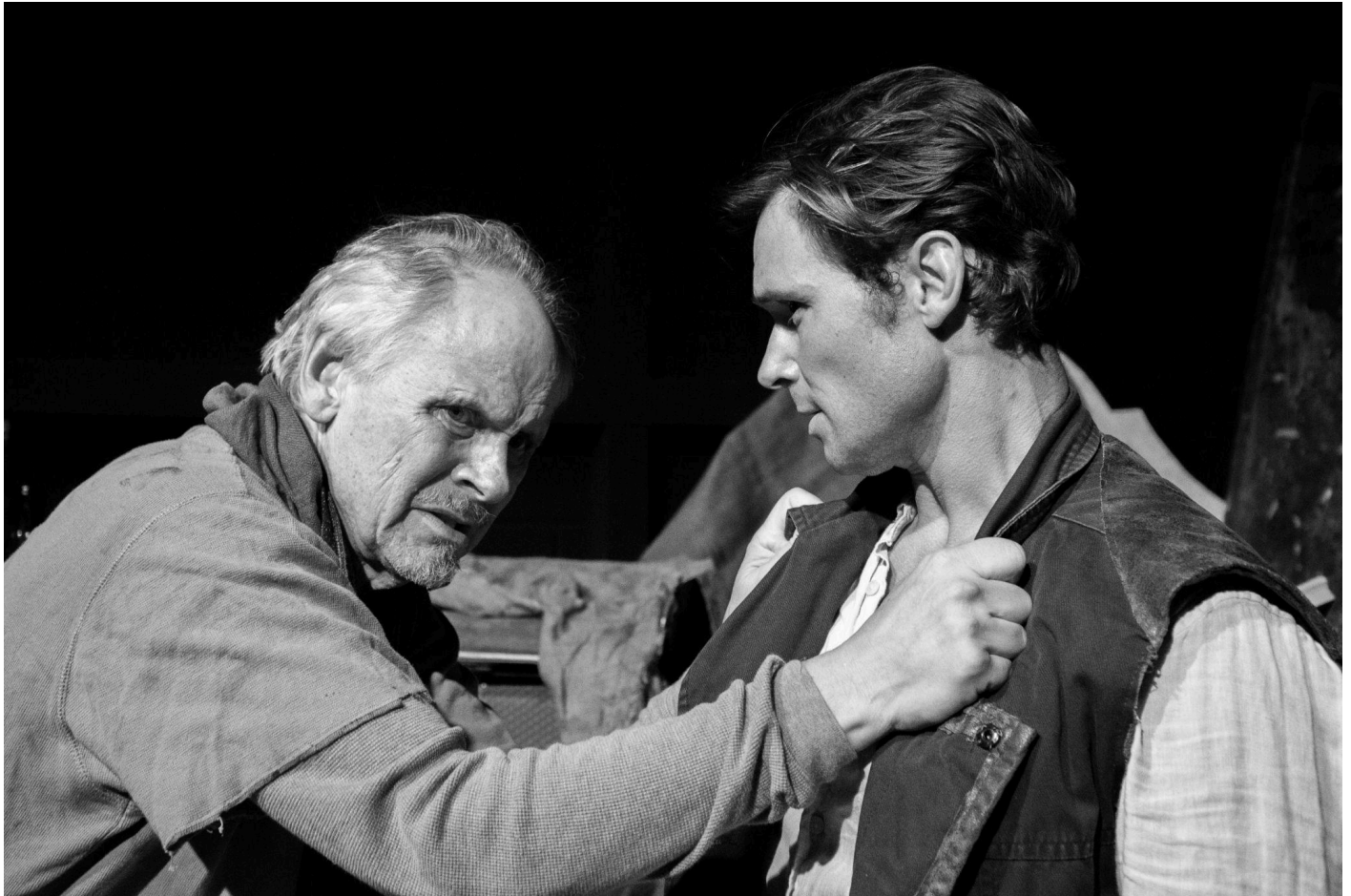
About the Authors



Lisa Peterson is an award-winning American director and playwright/adaptor and a two-time Obie winner for her productions of AN ILIAD (adapted with actor Denis O'Hare) and *Light Shining In Buckinghamshire*. She was Resident Director at the Mark Taper Forum for 10 years, and previously Associate Director at La Jolla Playhouse. Directing credits include the world premieres of works by Donald Margulies (*Collected Stories, The Model Apartment*), Tony Kushner (*Slavs!*), Naomi Wallace (*Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*), Beth Henley, Caryl Churchill, Janusz Glowacki, Marlane Meyer, Culture Clash, Jose Rivera, and many others. She has worked at theaters around the country including New York Theater Workshop, The Public, Playwrights Horizons, Manhattan Theatre Club, Guthrie Theater, Seattle Rep, Berkeley Rep, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arena Stage, and the McCarter Theatre.



Denis O'Hare has appeared numerous times on Broadway in such pieces as *Inherit The Wind*, *Sweet Charity* (Drama Desk Award), *Assassins* (Tony® nominee), *Take Me Out* (Tony, Drama Desk awards), *Major Barbara*, and *Cabaret*. His regional work includes Seattle Rep, Arena Stage, Goodman Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, Remains Theatre and the McCarter Theatre. A prolific film and T.V. actor, Denis appeared in two seasons of "True Blood" as King Russell Edgington, on the premiere season of "American Horror Story," and as Judge Abernathy on "The Good Wife". Film work includes "C.O.G.", "The Eagle", "Changeling", "Milk", "Michael Clayton", "A Mighty Heart", "Duplicity", "The Proposal", "Charlie Wilson's War", and "Garden State" among others.



Promotional photo by Will Kerner featuring (l-r): David Minton, Jesse Timmons

[Performance History](#)

AN ILIAD was originally produced by Seattle Repertory Theatre in 2010, directed by co-playwright Lisa Peterson. The play was produced later that same year at the McCarter Theatre Center in New Jersey featuring Stephen Spinella as The Poet. In 2012, AN ILIAD was produced at New York Theatre Workshop featuring Denis O'Hare (also co-playwright) and Stephen Spinella alternating nights as The Poet.

The World of the Iliad



The Bronze Age began in Greece in roughly 2000 BCE. This is recognized by the emergence of bronze being used in tool and weapon-making. Greece became the economic center of the Mediterranean in this period, trading with both inland civilizations, and others along the Mediterranean. This was the time the great mythological warriors such as Jason, Achilles, and Odysseus are said to have lived.

The fall of Troy in approximately 1200 BCE was followed by the fall of other prosperous Bronze Age civilizations. The end of this period was most likely when the events of *The Iliad* were intended to be set.

The Gods of the Iliad

Supporting the Greeks

Hera - Queen of the gods, wife of Zeus, the goddess of marriage, women and family.

Athena - Goddess of wisdom and warfare, the patron god of Athens, the daughter of Zeus.

Poseidon - God of the sea, storms and earthquakes, and the brother of Zeus.

Thetis - A goddess of water and the mother of Achilles.

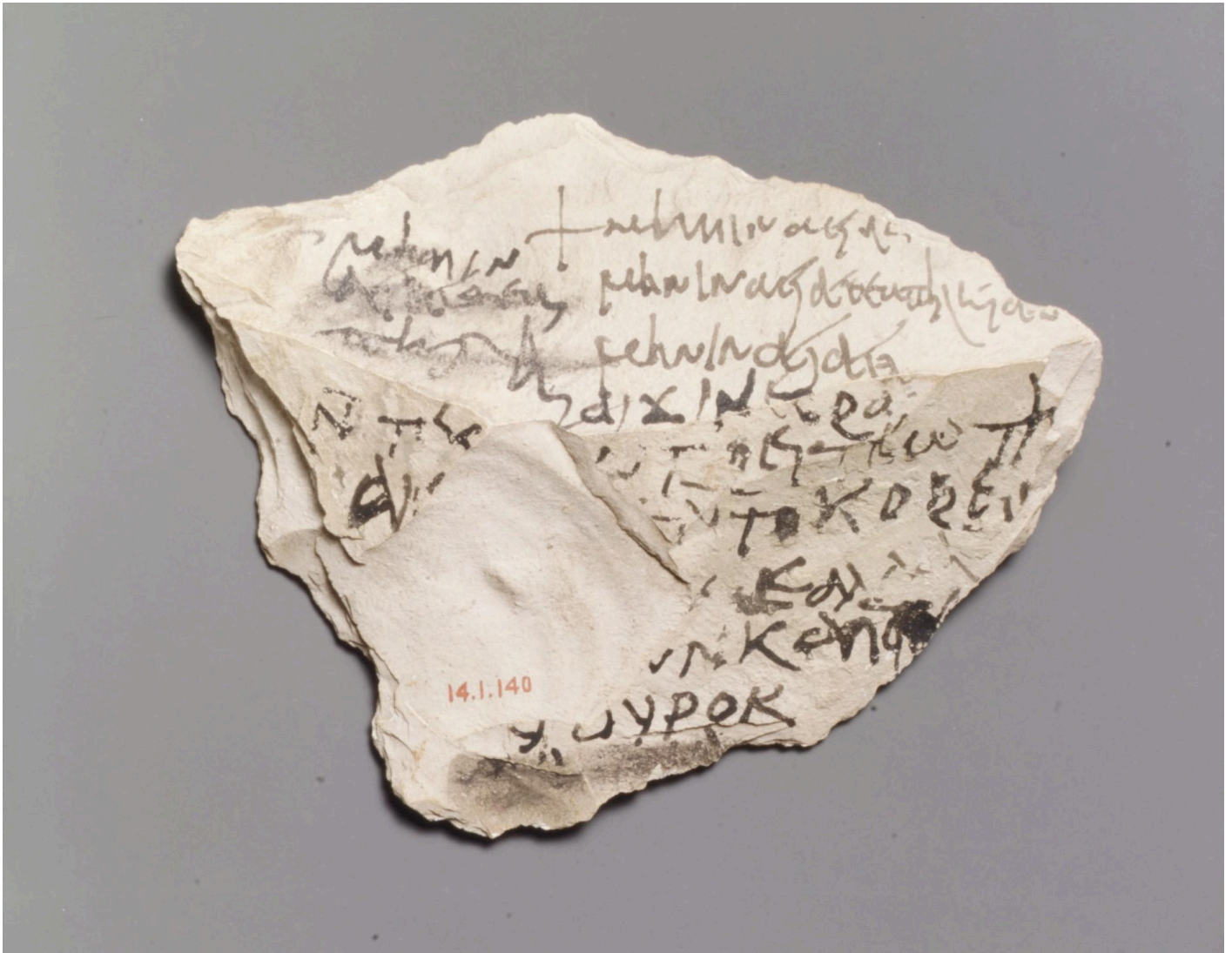
Supporting the Trojans

Ares - God of war, the lover of Aphrodite, brother of Athena and the son of Zeus and Hera.

Apollo - The god of oracles, healing and archery, the twin brother of Artemis, and a bringer of plague.

Aphrodite - Goddess of love, lust and beauty. Her feud with Hera and Athena is one of the major events that led to the Trojan War.

The Duels

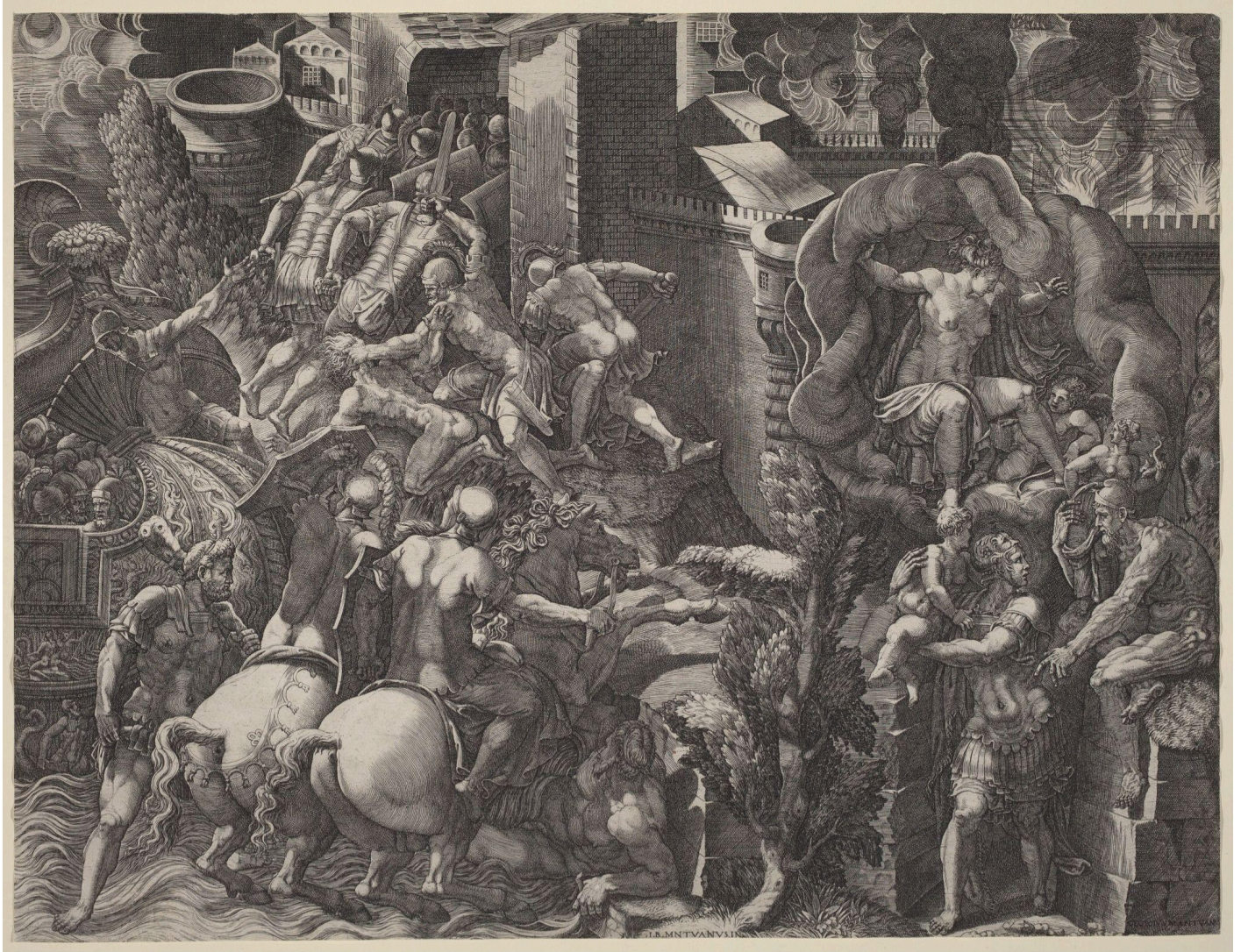


An ostraka (text on broken pottery) displaying lines from the Iliad: "Sing, goddess, the wrath of Peleus's son."

What is referred to as the Trojan "War" is better understood, in its many tellings, as a siege of the city of Troy. For 10 years the Achaean forces attacked the city with a variety of battles and, more famously, duels taking place outside of the city walls (Chicco & Tebala, 2021).

Across the 24 books of *The Iliad*, three major duels occur. Paris, prince of Troy, duels Menelaus, the King of Sparta, and abducts his wife, Helen, beginning the war. Ajax, the second greatest of all the Greek heroes and Hector, the greatest of Troy's heroes and older brother of

Paris, duel in Book VII. The final great duel of the story between Hector and Achilles ends in the death of Hector and sets up the fall of Troy.



The Fall of Troy and the Escape of Aeneas, c. 1545 by Giorgio Ghisi after Giovanni Battista Scultori



Achilles and Patroclus, 1784/1789 by Philippe-Auguste Hennequin

[Patroclus and Achilles' Wrath](#)

Rage is a critical emotion in ancient myth, particularly in *The Iliad*. It's often associated with Achilles, who is both a great warrior, and quick to anger. In Book I, it's the result of Agamemnon ignoring the priest of Apollo, causing the god to send a plague to the Achaeans. Achilles, frustrated with Agamemnon's tenuous leadership, publicly berates him. The two continue to argue about who the greater man is. Agamemnon demands Achilles surrender Briseis, a woman who Achilles claimed after sacking the city of Lyrnessus. While Achilles gives her to Agamemnon, his pride is deeply wounded at giving up his "prize". Though he is a great commander and the greatest hero of the Achaeans, Achilles refuses to fight in the Trojan War even though he is begged by his friends.

Achilles' childhood friend, deepest confidant, and oft depicted lover is Patroclus, a Greek soldier. As *The Iliad* continues and the tide of battle turns against the Greeks, Patroclus requests permission to lead a group of warriors into battle. Achilles agrees, giving his armor to Patroclus and instructing him to return after the Trojans returned to their ships.

However, Patroclus ignores this order, and pursues the Trojans to the gates of Troy. It's here, with the help of Apollo, that Hector kills Patroclus with his spear. When he finally kills Hector, he continually desecrates his body, dragging it behind his chariot. It takes Priam, the father of Hector and Paris, coming to Achilles and begging for his son's body for Achilles to relent. The two share a meal and return the body.

This event marks the end of *The Iliad*, but Achilles' wrath has become legendary, and continues to raise questions about forgiveness, grief, and wrath.

About the Director

David Minton is a director, actor, producer, instructor, and playwright with over 45 years of professional theater experience in Dallas, New York, and Washington DC. In Dallas, David was instrumental in the conception and management of the new Addison Theatre Facility, called by Theatre Crafts Magazine “a Theater for the 21st century.” David was the co-founder of Lumina Studio Theatre in the DC area, a high-concept youth Shakespeare company currently celebrating its 27th year of operation which performs in Silver Spring’s Black Box Theatre. With Live Arts, he directed MARRIAGE WARS for the 2021 Locally Sourced, UNABASHEDLY in the 2023 WATERWORKS Festival, and SHADES AND SHADOWS and AN ODD CONFLUENCE in the 2024 WATERWORKS. David appeared in THE CHILDREN (2022) and LOVE AND INFORMATION (2023), and has taught three acting workshops at Live Arts.

About the Dramaturg

Jon Mikalson is the Emeritus William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Classics at the University of Virginia. Since 1970 he has taught and written ten books on ancient Greek religion, literature, and culture. He welcomes this opportunity to see firsthand the creativity, dedication, and hard work the director, actors, and crew bring to this dramatization of *The Iliad*.

Talkback Information

The audience talkback with members of the cast and crew of AN ILIAD is scheduled for 9:30pm on Thursday, October 17, 2024, in the Founders Theater (123 E. Water Street, 3rd floor), facilitated by Education Director Daniel Kunkel. You do not need to purchase a ticket to the October 17 show to attend the talkback. This program is provided free of charge to the Charlottesville community.

Please email Daniel daniel@livearts.org with questions about the event.