Ancient personality:
Trait attributions to characters in Homer's *Iliad*

CONSTANTINOS G. PASSAKOS
University of Athens, Greece

BOELE DE RAAD
University of Groningen, The Netherlands

Introduction

Personality and character description has been documented in different ways. One general understanding of the so-called psycho-lexical approach (De Raad, 2000) is that personality traits are documented in our lexicon, practically in a tangible representation of that lexicon such as a dictionary. More specifically, a kernel characteristic of the approach is that the more a psychological trait is referred to, the more important that characteristic apparently is. So, relevance of a trait is judged by frequency. The lexical documentation has shown to be fruitful (see, e.g., Ashton, Lee, Perugini, Szarota, De Vries, Di Blas, Boies, & De Raad, 2004; De Raad & Peabody, 2005), but it is not the only way to arrive at a representation of how personality and character may be conceived of. One alternative and possibly fruitful route towards personality and character description is tracing personages and their trait-attributions in literary works (cf. Bromley, 1977; McAdams, 1994). Such an approach may be particularly interesting because of the sustained effort of the author(s) to depict personages in a rich, contextualized way, contingent upon the details of the rest of the story. The commonality of the different approaches is in the sedimentation of conceptions of personality and character in words, and may be also in images. In order to arrive at a full understanding of the various personality constructs and the subtleties expressed in the facets of those constructs, we believe it is wise to draw from a

variety of traditions in which person-characterizations take place, including gossip, letters, films, and literary texts.

Different views have been developed with respect to the characterization of personages in literary texts. Forster (1927), for example, distinguishes between *round* and *flat* characters. Round characters are "realistic", meaning that they are lifelike, complex, and surprising. Round characters are preferred over flat characters because they heighten the dramatic value of the text. De Beus (1979) describes a method to classify the various aspects of characterization of personages, which method assumes the portrayal of characters in text to be realized by making use of typical trait words, as well as references to outer characteristics, feelings, thoughts, actions, history, etc. In this paper, we aim at a full account of characterizations in a literary text of great historical importance in Western culture, namely Homer's *Iliad*. The *Iliad* is of particular interest because of the hundreds of personages playing a role in the story, of which many are provided with character descriptions. The psycho-lexical approach that is followed here does not aim at a full psychological portrait of the distinct personages in the text, but aims at a full account of the trait descriptions. The focus is not on how ancient conceptions of personality and character might be derived from courses of action and deliberations on choices about what to do or not to do (see, e.g., Gill, 1986; 1996), but rather on the characteristic vocabulary as exposed in the myriad of epithets by which the personages are identified.

Conceptions of personality and character may differ across time (Gill, 1996) and culture (e.g., Cashdan, 1980; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). The use of this historical text of Homer for the study of literary characterizations may elicit expectations about such differences, and, indeed, results from this study may be of historical interest and may point towards such differences. We consider such differences, however, as beyond the scope of this paper.

The psycho-lexical approach

One of the main goals of the psycho-lexical approach to personality in studies during the last few decades has been the construction of a cross-culturally useful medium for communicating on personality, a generally accepted vocabulary of personality traits (cf. John, Goldberg, & Angleitner, 1984; Saucier & Goldberg, 1996). That goal may be achieved following different routes. The rationale of the approach is expressed in the so-called *lexical hypothesis*, stating that all aspects of human personality which are or

have been of importance, interest or utility have become encoded or will be encoded in language. The more important such aspects are, the more people wish to talk of them, with the result that words will be invented for them (Cattell, 1943; De Raad, 2000; Goldberg, 1981).

The most obvious route toward trait-taxonomy, has been by tracking down trait words from the dictionary, listing them, and structuring them. The psycho-lexical approach is not condemned to this dictionary approach, labeled "alphabetical psychology" by Kouwer (1963). Besides dictionaries, one could make use of books, letters, audiotapes, films, free descriptions (see, e.g., Kohnstamm, Halverson, Mervielde, & Havill, 1998; Passakos, 2003), free associations, as long as such use would produce the most relevant terms to describe personality. These other routes toward a vocabulary of traits are hardly explored. Two potentially fruitful alternative routes are the study of person-talk (De Raad & Caljé, 1990) and the study of characterization in fiction (cf. Bromley, 1977). These different lexical routes may be accompanied by their own specific advantages and disadvantages.

A major problem in the dictionary approach has been the sheer number of trait words. Allport and Odbert (1936) listed 17,953 "Trait-names", all selected from the second edition of the unabridged *Webster's New International Dictionary*. De Raad and Barelds (2008) constructed a list of 25,494 words with relevance to personality traits, taken from a computerized database of the Dutch language. It is clear, on the evidence of the above mentioned two lists, that there is an enormous variety of features with which people are endowed and through which they relate to each other as unique individuals. The Allport and Odbert list has formed the starting-point of the dictionary approach which, in turn, has led to the development of a device with a great apparent potential, the Big Five model of personality. The model summarizes the large variety of trait words in five underlying dimensions, namely Extraversion (versus Introversion), Agreeableness (versus Disagreeableness), Conscientiousness (versus its opposite), Emotional Stability (versus its opposite), and Intellectual Autonomy (versus its opposite). This model enables to express any idea about personality or character in terms of these five dimensions or combinations of them.

In their "Better than the alphabet", John, Goldberg, and Angleitner (1984) pointed out some aspects of the ordered character of such a corpus of trait semantics. Moreover, they suggested that a "compelling semantic taxonomy of individual-difference terms would greatly facilitate communication between personality researchers" (John et al., 1984, p. 86). An alphabetical vocabulary of personality is characterized by different word forms

corresponding to their distinct linguistic uses: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, etc. Aschenbrenner (1971, p. 2) analyzed the so-called "appraisive vocabulary" of character into corresponding psychological word-classes, namely *substantives*, such as "bully" and "boor", *processives*, such as "besmirch" and "flay", *attributives*, such as "happy" and "lonely", *elicitives*, such as "delightful" and "boresome", and *conformatives*, such as "authentic" and "normal" (cf. Angleitner, Ostendorf, & John, 1990; De Raad, 1992). The availability of the different forms greatly enhances the pragmatic and descriptive power of character references in the communication on personality.

The advantage of the alphabetical approach is that its resources have been under systematic surveillance by generations of lexicographers, the disadvantage being the lack of shading, context, and specificity (cf. Briggs, 1992): dictionary entries do not provide information about how to use a word in an appropriate context. The non-alphabetical resources such as characterization in fiction and person-talk might give such information.

Characterization in talk and text

Two of the most interesting non-alphabetical resources are indeed formed by the literary text, as in a novel, and by everyday talk about persons (De Raad & Caljé, 1990). The two have in common the interest in portraying the weal and woe of individuals, their motives, achievements, relationships, their adjustments. Everyday person-talk, however, lacks a "contract" (Carson, 1969) to be descriptive and articulated. In everyday talk interactions may halt, start again in another direction, flag, and restart. There is no explicit coordination in pursuing a goal or in continuing with the same topic, as is usually the case in a meeting with an agenda and a chair-person. There is a transient interest in a veridical portrayal of the discussed person. Everyday person-talk should be distinguished from a serious journalistic account of a person's actions and circumstances, which latter form comes closer to the clinical case study (cf. Bromley, 1977).

In literary characterization, the author may invest in a relatively explicit staging of the novel's protagonist, but often does so in function of furthering the plot in which certain qualities, for example value and morality, are the main themes. Examples are *greed*, as in Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, and *apathy* and *drowsiness*, as in Ivan Goncharov's Oblomov. An enriching approach to a full understanding of the life course of a single individual is

argued to be the *psychobiography* (McAdams, 1994; Runyan, 1997), a psychologically informed biography using psychological theory systematically to transform a life into a coherent and illuminating story (McAdams, 1988, p. 2). A major problem with the latter approach is that the amount of biographical data may be used for a variety of interpretations (cf. Runyan, 1981).

In the different "narrative" accounts – literary character, but also person-talk and case study – the concept of the "person" is often introduced for the element of stability (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 294–295), which is frequently rendered by designating the person in terms of traits ("your miser of a father"), emotions ("she whose fury pursued you through childhood"), and epithets ("this hero …"). In the present study, we focus on the trait designations made in Homer's *Iliad*.

Homer's *Iliad* is, however, far from typical fiction. It is a blend of poetry, fiction, and historical documentation. It reports in part on a war that is considered to have taken place between 1300 BC and 1200 BC, the Trojan War. One strikingly interesting feature with the *Iliad* is the large number of characters portrayed, both human characters and deities. These characters are attributed with traits and epithets to aggrandize their distinct contributions to the epic. The recitation of traits throughout the text makes the *Iliad* of special interest for a study of the personality lexicon. In this study, we aim at a full representation of the large variety of traits and epithets displayed in the *Iliad*, in order to arrive at an in-depth view on the "archetypical" personality conceptualizations in ancient history.

Historical trait-archives

Throughout ages people have conversed over people. Daily conversations at home, in a bar, or at work mostly relate to behavior and traits of self or others. Ideas about people are put into words according to the speaker's intention, both regarding the content – is the observation well captured? – and regarding the use – how does one react? If words fail, new words or more prosaic expressions are invented or metaphors are used. The practical use provides feedback on the efficacy of the expression. Words are continuously tested on their adequacy. Much of this person-talk has a moral tone, it is *character-talk*: who does what and why, and is it good or bad? Who is popular and who is not, and why? How to deal with a difficult child, a difficult partner, or a colleague (cf. Dunbar, 1997)? Expressions, such as "egotistic",

"aggressive", and "shy", that have proven their usefulness in their capacity to represent and communicate facts of experience obtain a place in the archive of words. History has provided a rich storehouse of trait-relevant information that we can hardly afford to ignore (cf. Wiggins, 1973).

For the emergence of the study of individual differences, modern trait psychology often refers to ancient Greece: to the characters of Theophrastus for the *descriptive* aspect, and to the "humores" of Galen for the *causative* aspect (cf. Roback, 1927). There is an interesting commonality between these two ancient notions, namely their emphasis on an *optimal balance*, which implies the possibility of anomaly, in terms of temperament or in terms of character.

Most of the attributes that have been considered important since ancient history were directly or indirectly linked to societal values; they are moral attributes, which are characterized by having two faces: that of personality trait and that of virtue. Politeness, for example, is both a trait and a virtue, and so are courage, tolerance, and loyalty (see, for example, Comte-Sponville, 1995). The best known antique "character system" is that of Theophrastus. That system not only lists character attributes like those mentioned above, but also elaborates them in the form of types of people easily recognizable through the enumeration of characteristic behaviors and mannerisms. Theophrastus described 30 such character-types, all with a suggestive, edifying meaning, conveying aspects of the morals of the time. The moral aspect has been attached to *character* throughout history. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is about vices and virtues; Theophrastus' *Characters* are about faults and vices. In the writings of Theophrastus, of Aristotle, of Plato, and many others, a major theme has been to point out the societal importance of the scarce psychological resources of high moral and educated nature. The character writing given form by Theophrastus gained enormous popularity especially since the Renaissance and has led to a rich school of character-writing. Aldington's unique Book of Characters (1925) has brought together some 500 short character studies from the time of Theophrastus to the eighteenth century British and French writers.

There is, however, no indication that character-description was striving after comprehensiveness or that it was done systematically. The 30 characters of Theophrastus, for example, are no exception at this point. De Raad and Ceulemans (2001) analyzed the semantics of the traits represented in the 30 characters in terms of the Big Five system, and they found that the characters are best described in terms of combinations of the trait factors Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. This finding supports the general under-

standing of those characters to convey primarily a moral message, and it tells that the characters cover a relatively narrow area of the trait domain.

Culture and change

The meanings of words may change over time, and be evaluated differently in different cultures. Contemporary cross-cultural studies on personality traits provide some examples of differences in evaluation. In Europe, the evaluative connotation of *aggressive*, for example, is negative, while it is mildly positive in American English. Only about sixty years ago, *introversion* was considered as a positive characteristic, referring to someone of high standards, talented, erudite, and original, while *extraversion* used to refer to someone who is superficial and mentally poor. Time has changed this drastically: nowadays the extraverted person rules the world and occupies leading positions, while the introverted is considered as a nonsocial, eccentric and odd character. Neutral trait terms are generally hard to find. Yet, the psycho-lexical approach to personality aims at a trait lexicon that is descriptive and relatively neutral, and the Big Five trait factors have such a descriptive potential. Yet, although the Big Five system has been stripped of extreme evaluative connotations, each and every character trait word conveys evaluative meaning. Using the Big Five system may somewhat de-emphasize the evaluative features of character description, they cannot be fully avoided.

Homer's Iliad

The blind poet Homer who is held responsible for two major Greek poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (cf. Wood, 1971), lived more than 500 years after the Trojan War. The apparently captivating events at Troy were narrated and orally transmitted and subsequently passed on as an oral tradition by professional story-tellers, most notably Homer. The *Iliad* concentrates on the wrath of Achilles. He was offended by Agamemnon who took the slave-girl Briseis away from him. Achilles withdraws from the battle until his best friend Patroclus is killed by Hector, commander of the Trojans. Achilles had a choice. He could stay away from the war and possibly live a relatively long, happy, and anonymous life, or he could go to war, become a famous hero, and possibly die young. The latter happens.

Technical features of the Iliad

The *Iliad* is conventionally divided into 24 chapters, made up of just over 15,690 text-lines of dactylic hexameter (Porter, 2006). In order to fill out the portions of this rhythmic scheme, which greatly facilitated the oral delivery of the story, repetitive phrases and a stock of so-called *epithets* were employed. The epithet is an adjectival phrase in which adjectives are used in combination of a noun, usually a person's name, as in *Catherine the Great* (cf. Ink & Montgomery, 1944). The fixed combination of the name-plus-trait-adjective produces a figure of speech that is easily identifiable, one that typically fits the oral recitation.

   In the *Iliad*, the epithets are used again and again when referring to the characters, as in "Achilles *of the swift feet*" (πόδας ταχύς (ὠκύς) or "Hector *of the shining helm*" (κορυθάιολος). The use of such formulaic language sometimes led to inconsistencies (cf. Lattimore, 1972). For example, the heavens could be *starry*, even at daytime, Aphrodite could be *laughter-loving* (φιλομειδής), even when she was crying, and, indeed, Achilles was called *swift-footed* (πόδας ταχύς), even when he was sitting down (cf. Porter, 2006). Homer was an oral bard performing before a live audience, Parry (1971) explained, and Homer would create his poems relatively afresh at each performance, thereby drawing upon the vast repertoire of tales concerning the *Iliad*'s heroes, and giving the characters a consistent qualification throughout the story (cf. Lesky, 1963). Where personages are merely referred to in the *Iliad* for rhythmical purposes, through the iterative use of formulaic epithets, such references need not add to the relevance of the character attributions. For this reason, we distinguish frequency of occurrence of epithets from the number of distinct epithets in the analyses.

The cast of the Iliad's characters

In the *Iliad* some 750 persons (mortals and gods) are named, many of which pass in review. Quite a few are briefly mentioned, and others are repeatedly put on stage, most notably Achilles, the main character in the *Iliad*. The list of characters contains gods and goddesses, such as Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty, and Poseidon, god of the sea. Furthermore, the list contains Greek mortals, such as Agamemnon, leader of the Achaeans (Greeks) at Troy, and Nestor, aged king of Pylos and wise counselor. Finally, the list contains Trojan mortals, such as Aeneas, leader of a Trojan clan, and Hector,

commander of the Trojans. These are some of the main characters. In addition, there are many warriors mentioned, or allies, who play a brief role. Also, there is a large number of armies on both the Greek and the Trojan side that play a role as personages in the story of the Trojan war.

Homeric psychology

The gods and the mortals in the *Iliad* have much in common, as far as their characterizations are concerned. Both the mortals and the gods play an active role in the Trojan conflict. Moreover, some of the mortals are sons or daughters of gods. Aeneas and Helen, for example, respectively are the son and daughter of Aphrodite and Zeus. The mortals and the gods also differ, in terms of powers, abilities, needs, and virtues. Not only mortals but also gods have their limitations. They can be in error; they are not particularly merciful; they are not infallible. Human characteristics are attributed to gods, and superhuman characteristics are attributed to mortals (cf. Jonos, 2003).

Homer does not seem to be particularly interested in the psychological nature of man; there is no explicit psychology by which Homer understands his characters. He seems to be an observer of the behavior of the heroes, describes what they do, which decisions they take, and what they accomplish (cf. Passakos, 2003). Those descriptions almost without exception contain epithets. Particularly, because so many different personages figure in the *Iliad*, each attributed with a distinct psychological characterization, the *Iliad* is also a display of character and characterizations. This latter observation, in combination with its prominence in Greek history and its salience in European history, makes the *Iliad* a most important and intriguing text for tracing ancient personality.

There is much more psychology traceable than we intend to describe systematically in this paper (cf. Gill, 1996), witness, for example, the reaction by Achilles expressed to his mother Thetis, when the Greeks are driven back to their ships, as Achilles had prayed they would be: "But what pleasure is this to me now, when my beloved friend is dead, Patroclus, whom I cherished beyond all friends, as the equal of my own soul; I am bereft of him". And Thetis tells her son's story to Hephaestus, concluding: "he is lying on the ground, anguishing at heart". Homer's psychological characterizations preceded the epoch of the fifth century BC, in which psychological analysis of human individuality, according to Romilly (1991), seems to

emerge, for example, in the tragedies of Aeschylos, Sophocles, and Euripides.

The central plot in the Iliad was fuelled by Achilles' rage against Agamemnon, who had taken away his slave-girl Briseis, and by his rage against Hector, who had killed his best friend. The *Iliad* is about rage and revenge, about right and wrong, about friendship and agony, mourning and anger, jealousy and loyalty. But may be more important than this, the *Iliad* is about the values of the time, especially about honor, virtue, and fame (cf. Passakos, 1974).

Heroism

If an overarching theory could be pointed out for Homer's *Iliad*, which the characters' actions might be understood to issue from, this would possibly be put in terms of the most reiterated cultural and moral values of the time, *honor* (τιμή) and *virtue* (ἀρετή), and the reward for achieving honor and virtue, namely *fame* (κλέος) (cf. Pérez-Álvarez & García-Montes, 2004). The typical hero in the *Iliad* defends his honor with struggle, fight, and impetus. And all free men who were fighting in the Trojan war were considered heroes. Apart from Achilles' rage, perhaps the most important theme of the *Iliad* is indeed the idea of what a hero is. Being virtuous, in the sense of *areté* means that you use your personal resources to the best you can; a hero is not only brave, but also effective.

The epithets

The complete set of a little more than 15,690 verses of the *Iliad* was thoroughly searched for epithets, used to refer to mortals or to immortals. The total number of times epithets could unambiguously be identified in the *Iliad* was 1,713. They were references to Achaeans (1,098), Trojans (239), or Gods (376). The top ten epithets with their frequencies for each of these three groups are given in Table 1.

The content of Table 1 displays the epic nature of the *Iliad* in which Homer sings the praises of the heroes. Not all of the epithets were references to character, however. The list also included physical characteristics, e.g., *swift-footed* (πόδας ταχύς; ὠκύς) Achilles. Moreover, some adjectival expressions were included that were used periphrastically, that is, used as trait

Table 1. Top ten epithets with frequencies

Achaeans		
God-like/noble	99	δῖος
Exquisite/gentle	64	ἄριστος
Brave	49	καρτερός & κρατερός
Magnanimous	47	μεγάθυμος
Irreproachable	42	ἀμύμων
Swift-footed	32	πόδας ταχύς (ὠκύς)
Virtuous	30	ἐσθλός
Well-greaved	28	εὐκνήμιδες
Audacious	24	δαΐφρων
Cherished by Zeus	21	διοτρεφής
Trojans		
God-like/noble	26	δῖος
Wondrous	23	φαίδιμος
Exquisite/gentle	14	ἄριστος
Divine	12	θεοειδής
Virtuous	11	ἐσθλός
Of shining helm	9	κορυθαίολος
Equal to the gods	8	ἀντίθεος
Magnanimous	8	μεγάθυμος
High-minded	6	μεγαλήτωρ
Silly	5	νήπιος
Gods		
Bright-eyed	33	γλαυκῶπις
Revered	31	πότνια
White-armed	23	λευκώλενος
Aegis-holder	15	αἰγίοχος
Large-eyed	15	βοῶπις
Omniscient	14	μητίετα
Wide-eyed	12	εὐρυώπης
Quick-footed	11	ὠκύς
Cloud-gatherer	10	νεφεληγερέτα
Impetuous	10	θοῦρος

expression but not directly attributed to persons, for example *of a noble site* (εὐ πατέρεια), *enduring* (τλήμονα θυμὸν ἔχων), and undersized (μικρὸς ἐὴν δέμας).

The 1,713 epithets were translated into both English and Dutch, in which process the two authors and a native-English speaking expert in classics were involved. Part of this process consisted of finding a trait-descriptive equivalent in the Big Five personality lexicon, in this case the Dutch personality vocabulary. As a result of this process, a total of 1,057 epithets could be identified as trait-descriptive epithets. Of these, 732 were references to Achaeans (reduced to 67 %), 189 (reduced to 79 %) were references to Trojans, and 136 (reduced to 36 %) were references to gods. A relatively small number of the references to gods were actually trait-epithets. The remaining 656 epithets mainly referred to physical features (e.g., fair-cheeked [καλλι-πάρηος], long-haired [κομόων], bright-eyed [γλαυκῶπις]), mere evaluations (e.g., marvelous [κυδαλίμοιος; κυδάλιμος], wondrous [φαίδιμος]), skills of soldiers (e.g., famous warrior [δουρικλυτός], experienced in war [μήστωρ]; cf. Macurdy, 1923), reputations (e.g., famous [ἀριδείκετος], revered [κεδνό-τατος]), and specific capacities of gods (e.g., cloud-gatherer [νεφεληγε-ρέτα]).

The 1,057 trait-epithets were classified according to a "periodic table of personality traits", the so-called AB5C model, a representation of the Dutch Big Five trait structure (De Raad, Hendriks, & Hofstee, 1992; De Raad & Doddema-Winsemius, 2006). This "periodic table", capturing 1,203 Dutch traits, consists of ten columns and ten rows representing the ten factor poles of the Big Five model, with the factors Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Intellectual Autonomy. In the original Dutch trait structure, the cells in this "periodic table" accommodated traits that had their highest (primary) loading on the factor pole represented by the column and a smaller but still substantial (secondary) loading on the factor pole represented by the row (facet).

By simply identifying the present trait-epithets in the Dutch trait taxonomy, the epithets obtained a double code, the first representing their primary meaning (factor) and the second their secondary meaning (facet). Thus, the epithet *impetuous* (θοῦρος; Dutch: onstuimig) was identified as I+V+, meaning that *impetuous* had in the original Dutch structure a primary loading on Extraversion (I+) and a secondary loading on Intellectual Autonomy (V+), and the epithet *loud-sounding* (ἐρίγδουπος; Dutch: lawaaierig) was identified as I+II-, a trait with a primary loading on Extraversion and a secondary negative loading on Agreeableness. Only those terms from the

Table 2. Distribution of frequencies of trait-epithets over cells of the Big Five periodic table

	Extraversion		Agreeableness		Conscien-tiousness		Emotional Stability		Intellect	
	I+	I–	II+	II–	III+	III–	IV+	IV–	V+	V–
I+	1		88	18	3	2	58		11	
I–			9	2	3	16		2		2
II+	14	2	1		133					
II–	6	1		13		14	2	1		
III+	4		273		2		13		1	
III–	2			21					28	2
IV+	25			92	4				39	1
IV–	1	2	2	4		10				
V+	52		14		7		26			
V–	2	4		1		14		9		
Totals	107	9	387	151	152	56	99	12	79	5

Iliad were identified using the Dutch AB5C trait system, which had substantial loadings on one or two factors in that system. The results of this identification procedure are represented in Table 2, which has the form of the periodic table of traits. The largest number of trait-epithets was from the Agreeableness domain, in particular from the II+III+ cell. This is possibly due to the elevated style of referring to the glorified characteristics of the war-heroes, with such epithets as *superb* (πότνιος), *godlike* (θεοείκελος), *noble* and *godlike* (δῖος), and *heavenly* (θεῖος).

It makes sense to take certain cells together, because of related meanings. Traits from the cells I+III+ and III+I+, for example, are adjacent in meaning; traits from both cells combine meanings of Extraversion and Conscientiousness; they only differ in emphasis of primary and secondary meanings. The following combinations of cells represent the larger densities of trait-epithets. The two cells II+III+ (273) and III+II+ (133), represent the *goodness* and *sublimity* of the hero, but so does the combination I+II+ (14) and II+I+ (88), with trait-epithets such as *magnanimous* (μεγάθυμος), *high-minded* (μεγαλήτωρ), and *animated* (θαλερός). The combination I+IV+ (25) and IV+I+ (58) accommodates *heroism* and *courage* mainly. The combination IV+V+ (26) and V+IV+ (39) also accommodates characteristics typical of the hero, namely *boldness/courage* and *fearlessness*, but also *resourcefulness*. Moreover, the combination I+V+ (52) and V+I+ (11) represents still

another appreciated facet in the hero, namely *being impetuous* and *venturesome*. Finally, on the more negative side, the combinations II–IV+ (92) and IV+II– (2) and II–III– (21) and III–II– (14) again contain references to heroism and war with such trait-epithets as *bellicose* (φιλοπ(τ)όλεμος), *powerful* (ὄβριμος), *violent* (ὀβριμοεργός), *cruel* (ὠμηστής), and *destructive* (ἀΐδηλος).

The frequency distribution of trait-epithets in Table 2 turned out to emphasize once more that the story of the *Iliad* is epic indeed, not only in the narratives, but also in the character attributions. Assuming that the mere frequency of trait-epithets is expressive of their importance in making relevant distinctions, heroism is pointed out again to be the primary distinctive characteristic in the *Iliad*. For a full appreciation of the story documented in the *Iliad*, one should understand that it is the heroic character of the historical figures, together with the sublime capacities of the gods that contributed to the historical accomplishment narrated (see also Yiannacopoulos, 1992).

The emphasis on frequency of trait-epithets diverts the attention from the full array of distinctions made in the *Iliad*. Table 2 contains all trait-epithets mentioned. Quite a few trait-epithets appear more than once in the text, adding up to the total number of 1,057 epithets. Table 3 mentions the total set of distinctly unique trait-epithets, of which there are 197; so, the numbers in the cells of Table 3 represent different trait-epithets.

What is striking first in Table 3 is the enormous reduction of numbers in certain cells, proving the almost incessant use of certain trait-epithets throughout the text of the *Iliad*; this is particularly true for the II+III+ and III+II+ cells containing terms referring to the sublime and noble character of the war-heroes. What is striking in addition is that the II+ and II– columns are still mainly loaded with a variety of trait-epithets for both this noble character (II+III+) and the warlike and bellicose spirit of many or most of the personages. Moreover, the Extraversion column remains rather well accommodated in every facet, possibly expressing the loud, fierce, impetuous and energetic style of the war-hero.

Table 3 tells two stories. One is that up to a certain extent, heroism seems to permeate through the whole table, meaning that heroic aspects are not only to be found in the more typical characteristics contained for example in I+IV+ and IV+I+; they are found in almost all Big Five factors and facets. Each trait represented in the periodic table adds to the concept of heroism or adds to the reality – roundness – of the heroic character. So, the hero is not only courageous and bellicose, but may also be charming

Table 3. Distribution of distinct trait-epithets over cells of the Big Five periodic table

	Extraversion		Agreeableness		Conscien-tiousness		Emotional Stability		Intellect	
	I+	I–	II+	II–	III+	III–	IV+	IV–	V+	V–
I+	1		7	4	2	1	5		2	
I–			2	1	3	5		2		1
II+	6	1	1		5					
II–	3	1		4		10	1	1		
III+	3		21		1		3		1	
III–	2			9					1	2
IV+	5			19	4				8	1
IV–	1	2	2	3		4				
V+	7		1		3		13			
V–	2	3		1		3		3		
	30	7	34	41	18	23	22	6	12	4

(I+III+), modest (II+I–), stubborn (II–II–), thoughtful (III+I–), patient (IV+III+), and perceptive (V+III+).

The other story tells about the accommodating capacity of the periodic table of personality traits. All trait-epithets were accommodated by the Big Five periodic table. Characteristics that could not be accommodated were not traits, but physical features (e.g., *fair-cheeked* [καλλιπάρῃος]), evaluative appreciations (e.g., *revered* [κεδνότατος]), and other characteristics.

Distinct personages, distinct traits?

Certain trait-epithets were used only once or twice (e.g., *astute* [κεκασμέ-νος], *cruel* [ὠμηστής], *wary* [φρονέων]), but they were not used to separate distinct characters from the estimated 750 persons mentioned in the *Iliad*. The large majority of the personages were not characterized by a trait-epithet, but simply by their name and often by their position, achievement, or fate in either an army (e.g., Halius: Trojan warrior, "killed by Odysseus") or a family (e.g., Neleus, father of Nestor, "took his share of plunder").

In order to find out whether and to what extent personages were distinctly characterized in the *Iliad*, we went through the *Iliad* again, this time making use of an electronic version of the *Iliad*, made available on the inter-

net by Johnson (2000/1), who also provided an exhaustive glossary and index with names of personages and page numbers where they appeared in the *Iliad*. As confirmed in this glossary by Johnson (2000/1), the large majority of personages was mentioned only once and remained psychologically anonymous. We focused on the major personages in the *Iliad* which were put in capitals in Johnson's (2000/1) glossary, a list of 13 gods and goddesses, 20 Achaean mortals, and 16 Trojan mortals.

For each of these 49 major personages those epithets were listed which were directly associated with the names in the text (operationally: in the same line). The results of tracing once more the epithets, now in a different – electronic– medium, first generally reinforced the earlier confirmed epic nature of the *Iliad*, albeit with less precision and coloring. Assuming that distinction in the *Iliad* is indicated by repeated use of epithets, what stood out was that the characters were indeed mainly distinguished not by psychological features but by outer characteristics and warrior-skills.

Restricted to non-psychological epithets used at least five times produced the following list: Apollo, who is *far-shooting* (ἑκατηβελέτης; ἑκατηβόλος) with *the silver bow* (ἀργυρότοξος), Athena, who has *bright and glittery eyes* (γλαυκῶπις), Hera, who is *white-armed* (λευκώλενος) and *ox-eyed* (βοῶπις), Iris, who is *swift as the wind* (ποδήνεμος; ὠκέα), Poseidon, who is the *earth-shaker* (εἰνοσίγαιος), Thetis, who is *silver-footed* (ἀργυρό-πεζα), Zeus, who is *thunder-loving* (τερπικέραυνος) and *cloud-gatherer* (νεφεληγερέτα), Achilles, who is *swift-footed* (πόδας ταχύς (ὠκύς)), Ajax (Minor), who is *swift* (ταχύς), Diomedes, who is *expert in war-cries* (βοήν ἀγαθός) and *horse-taming* (ἱππόδαμος), Menelaus, who is *expert in war-cries* (βοήν ἀγαθός) and *fair-haired* (ξανθή), Hector, who is *bronze-armed* (χαλκοκορυστής) and wears *a shining helmet* (κορυθαίολος), and Nestor, who is a *Gerenian horseman* (Γερήνιος ἱππότα).

Trait-like epithets used at least five times produced the following list of distinctive personages: *laughter-loving* (φιλομειδής) Aphrodite, *head-strong* (σχέτλιος) and *insatiable (*φιλοκτεανώτατος) *man-killer* Ares, *powerful* (ὄβριμος) and *mighty* (εὐρυσθενής; κρατύς) Hercules, *greatest* (μέγιστος), *most powerful* (ὄβριμος), and *all mighty* (μέγας; μεγάλος) Zeus, *noble* (εὐρυ-κρείων), *godlike* (δῖος), *glorious* (ἀγέρωχος), *brave* (καρτερός & κρατερός), and *warlike* (αἰχμητής) Achilles, *mighty* (κρατύς) and *wide-ruling* (εὐρυ-κρείων) Agamemnon, *great* (μέγας), *noble* (φαίδιμος), *godlike* (θεοειδής; θεοείκελος), and *mighty* (κρατύς) (Major) Ajax, *noble* (δῖος), *mighty* (κρα-τύς), *powerful* (ὄβριμος), and *strong* (βίην ἀγαθός) Diomedes, *war-loving* (φιλοπόλεμος) Menelaus, *warlike* (φιλοπτόλεμος) and *brave* (ἄλκιμος) Me-

riones, *godlike* (θεοειδής), *resourceful* (πολύμητις), and *crafty* (πολύμη-τις) Odysseus, *brave* (ἄλκιμος) Patroclus, *brave* (ἄλκιμος) Aeneas, *glorious* (ἀγέρωχος), *godlike* (θεοείκελος), and *brave man-killer* (ἀνδροφόντης) Hector, *godlike* (δῖος) Priam, and *godlike* (θεοειδής) Sarpedon.

Distinctions are apparently not simply to be found in a single epithet, but usually in the combination of the name with a physical characteristic, a war-skill, and/or a trait-epithet. Ignoring repeated use of epithets, and using combinations, Paris is depicted as a *godlike* (θεοείκελος), *woman-mad* (γυναιμανής) seducer, Hephaestus as the *skilled* (ἐπιστάμενος) and *resourceful* (πολύμητις) god, and Calchas as the *prudent* (εὐφρονέων) prophet.

Discussion

We took Homer's *Iliad* to study traits ascribed to the various personages figuring in the epic text. Because of the overwhelming number of personages, and because of the apparent effort made by Homer to characterize the personages individually, the *Iliad* seemed suited for an alternative route towards trait description, that is alternative to the so-called lexical approach. The hundreds of trait-epithets used to describe the cast of characters in the *Iliad* could well be classified in the Big Five periodic table of personality traits (De Raad, et al., 1992). The sheer number of distinct personages suggested a great variety of trait-epithets to be identified, and although many of the niches of the periodic table of traits were used to accommodate trait-epithets from the *Iliad*, the main results were relatively restricted.

Compared to other studies in which the periodic table of traits was used to accommodate concepts (De Raad & Doddema-Winsemius, 1999; De Raad & Ceulemans, 2001; De Raad, 2005), this study adds to the differential potential of the Big Five periodic table. A long list of instinct-terms could well be accommodated by the periodic system, for example, and that list turned out to form a good representation of the various Big Five factors and facets, as indicated by a relatively even distribution of the instinct terms over the ten Big Five factor poles (De Raad & Doddema-Winsemius (1999). The 30 character descriptions of Theophrastus, although often understood to capture variety in character, turned out to be accommodated almost exclusively by the negative poles of the typical character factors, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. The present study on the *Iliad*, on the other hand, provides, although generally understood to form a display of the heroic character, a

relatively rich variety of trait-relevant terms, considering the distribution over the Big Five factor poles.

A large majority of personages in the *Iliad* are considered heroes. It should therefore not come as a surprise that the main theme standing out from the results of this study was portrayed in the various facets of the character of the hero, a conception of the hero that should be placed in a specific period of time. The facets of this heroic figure, exemplified in many of the personages in the *Iliad*, comprise trait-epithets such as *sublime* (θεοείκελος) and *noble* (εὐρυκρείων), *magnanimous* (μεγάθυμος) and *high-minded* (μεγάλητωρ), *courageous* (ἐΰς) and *fearless* (ἀδεής), *resourceful* (πολύμητις), *impetuous* (θοῦρος), and *venturesome* (μενεπτόλεμος), and finally *bellicose* (φιλοπ(τ)όλεμος) and *violent* (ὀβριμοεργός). These traits put the type of hero on stage that has the capacity par excellence to win a war in a man-to-man battle. Against the background of the Trojan war, in terms of the "periodic system" of the (Dutch) Big Five traits, the personages are firstly, mainly distinguished in terms of *modesty*, *sincerity*, *virtue*, and *respect* (not *peacefulness*) as opposed to being *shameless*, *devious*, and *perverted* (blends of [dis]Agreeableness and [un]Conscientiousness). Secondly, they are described in terms of being *decisive*, *vigorous*, *resolute*, and *strong* (blends of Emotional Stability and Intellect). Thirdly, they are described in terms of being *imperious*, *autocratic*, *dictatorial*, and *hard* (blends of Disagreeableness and Emotional Stability).

The "heroic" character-facets are reinforced by epithets that do not describe character, but that impress by their distinctive features, such as "with-the-shining-helmet", "bronze-armed", or "expert in war cries". The latter type of epithets function to enhance the glorifying and often daunting tenor of the dramatic figure. The full description of the hero proceeding from the *Iliad* approaches mythological proportions. In this respect, *Iliad*'s hero seems to exemplify the contemporary encyclopedic definition as, for example, provided in Webster's unabridged dictionary (1979) where the hero is primarily defined as 1) a man of great strength and courage, favored by the gods and in part descended from them, and 2) a man admired for his courage, nobility, or exploits, especially in war. It may, though, well be the case that *Iliad*'s heroes formed the model for this dictionary description.

A study like this has certainly restrictions, especially if the aim would be to arrive at a full trait vocabulary. The latter aim is possibly better achieved through the psycho-lexical approach. The present approach rather functions to picture a significant concept – heroism – in full. The quite detailed description of heroism proceeding from this study shows some resemblance to

the study of an equally ancient nature, by Theophrastus (De Raad & Ceule-mans, 2001), which study exhibited the various aspects of the moral charac-ter.

For studies ahead like the present the interest is possibly indeed especial-ly in the particularized detailing of concepts of interest. Gontsjarov's *Oblo-mov* could form an interesting study in kind to explicate the various features of laziness or drowsiness, and *The Great Gatsby* by Scott Fitzgerald may form a good candidate to draw the various features of greed. Romilly (1991) argued that the psychological interest in human individuality started to emerge during the fifth century BC, as manifested in the tragedies of Ae-schylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. So, many, many works of character await the dedicated analyses of personality researchers who are particularly inter-ested in the specific details of significant concepts. Such studies are worth-while for furthering a deeper understanding of individuality, personality, and character. Such studies draw heavily on the specific capacities, skills and insights of the authors of literary works, and they could exploit those insights for psychological purposes.

Acknowledgements

References

Aldington, R. 1925. *A book of 'characters'*. London: Routledge.

Allport, G.W., & Odbert, H.S. 1936. 'Trait-names: A psycho-lexical study', *Psychological Monographs* 47 (1, Whole No. 211).

Angleitner, A., Ostendorf, F., & John, O.P. 1990. 'Toward a taxonomy of personality descrip-tors in German: A psycho-lexical study', *European Journal of Personality* 4, 89–118.

Aschenbrenner, K. 1971. *The concepts of value: Foundations of value theory*. Dordrecht-Holland: Reidel Publishing Company.

Ashton, M.C., Lee, K., Perugini, M., Szarota, P., De Vries, R.E., Di Blas, L., Boies, K., & De Raad, B. 2004. 'A six-factor structure of personality-descriptive adjectives: Solutions from psycholexical studies in seven languages', *Journal of Personality and Social Psy-chology* 86, 356–366.

Briggs, S.R. 1992. 'Assessing the Five-Factor Model of personality description', *Journal of Personality 60*, 253–293.

Bromley, D.B. 1977. *Personality description in ordinary language*, London: Wiley.

Carson, R.C. 1969. *Interaction Concepts of Personality*, Chicago: Aldine.

Cashdan, E.A. 1980. 'Egalitarianism among hunters and gatherers', *American Anthropologist* 82, 116–120.

Comte-Sponville, A. 1995. *Petit traité des grandes vertus* [Little treatise of great virtues]. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

De Beus, M. 1979. 'Karakterisering. Een model voor de beschrijving van romanpersonages [Characterizing. A model for the description of personages in novels]', in M. Bal (ed.), *Mensen van papier: over personages in de literatuur* [People of paper: On personages in literature], Assen: Van Gorcum, 37–46.

De Raad, B. 2000. *The Big Five Personality Factors: The Psycholexical Approach to Personality*, Seattle: Hogrefe & Huber Publishers.

De Raad, B. 1992. 'The replicability of the Big Five personality dimensions in three word-classes of the Dutch language', *European Journal of Personality* 6, 15–29.

De Raad, B. 2005. 'The trait-coverage of emotional intelligence', *Personality and Individual Differences* 38, 673–687.

De Raad, B., & Barelds, D.P.H. 2008. 'A new taxonomy of Dutch personality traits based on a comprehensive and unrestricted list of descriptors', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, 347–364.

De Raad, B., & Caljé, H. 1990. 'Personality in the context of conversation: Person-talk scenarios replicated', *European Journal of Personality* 4, 19–36.

De Raad, B., & Ceulemans, E. 2001. 'The trait-dimensional scope of the characters of Theophrastus', in R. Riemann, F.M. Spinath, & F. Ostendorf (eds.), *Personality and Temperament: Genetics, Evolution, and Structure*, Lengerich: Pabst Science Publishers, 168–184.

De Raad, B., & Doddema-Winsemius, M. 1999. 'Instincts and personality', *Personality and Individual Differences* 27, 293–305.

De Raad, B., & Doddema-Winsemius, M. 2006. *De Big 5 persoonlijkheidsfactoren; A method for the description of personality traits* [The Big 5 personality factors; A method for the description of personality traits], Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Nieuwezijds.

De Raad, B., Hendriks, A.A.J., & Hofstee, W.K.B. 1992. 'Towards a refined structure of personality traits', *European Journal of Personality* 6, 301–319.

De Raad, B., & Peabody, D. 2005. 'Cross-culturally recurrent personality factors: Analyses of three factors', *European Journal of Personality* 19, 451–474.

Dunbar, R. 1997. *Vlooien, roddelen, en de ontwikkeling van taal*, Baarn: Ambo.

Forster, E.M. 1927. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Arnold.

Gill, C. 1986. 'The question of character and personality in Greek tragedy', *Poetics Today* 7, 251–273.

Gill, C. 1996. *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ink, N., & Montgomery, H.C. 1944. 'The Homeric epithet in contemporary literature', *The Classical Journal* 39, 229–231.

John, O.P., Goldberg, L.R., & Angleitner, A. 1984. 'Better than the alphabet: Taxonomies of personality-descriptive terms in English, Dutch, and German', in H. Bonarius, G., Van Heck, & N. Smid (eds.), *Personality psychology in Europe: Theoretical and empirical developments*, Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger, 83–100.

Johnson, I. 2000/1. 'The Iliad', *www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliad_title.htm*

Jonos, P. 2003. *Iliad, our world*, Athens: Exantas Publications.

Kohnstamm, G. A., Halverson, C. F., Jr., Mervielde, I., & Havill, V. L. 1998. 'Analyzing parental free descriptions of child personality', in G. A. Kohnstamm, C. F. Halverson, Jr.,

I. Mervielde, & V. L. Havill (eds.), *Parental descriptions of child personality: Developmental antecedents of the Big Five?* , Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1–9.

Kouwer, B.J. 1963. *Het spel van de persoonlijkheid* [The game of personality], Utrecht: Erven J. Bijleveld.

Lattimore, R. 1972. *The Iliad of Homer* (Lattimore translation). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lesky, A. 1963. *Geschichte der Griechischen Literatur* [History of Greek Literature], München: K.G. Saur Verlag.

Liddell, H.G., & Scott, R. 1940–1958. *A Greek-English lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lord, A. B. 1960. *The singer of tales*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Macurdy, G.H. 1923. 'The horse-taming Trojans', *The Classical Quarterly* 17, 50–52.

McAdams, D.P. 1994. *The Person: An introduction to personality psychology*, Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Nisbett, R., & Cohen, D. 1996. *Culture of Honor*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Parry, A. (ed.) 1971. *The making of Homeric verse: The collected papers of Milman Parry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Passakos, C.G. 1974. *Stability and change in values and evaluative attitudes: A research work*, Athens: University of Athens Publications.

Passakos, C. 2003. *The person in the process of becoming: An introduction to modern personality psychology*, Athens: University of Athens Publications.

Perelman, Ch., Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. 1969. *The new rhetoric: Treatise on argumentation*. Trans. John Wilkinson & Purcell Weaver, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Pérez-Álvarez, M., & García-Montes, J. 2004. 'Personality as a work of art', *New Ideas in Psychology* 22, 157–173.

Porter, J. 2006. 'The Iliad as oral formulaic poetry', *http://duke.usask.ca/~porterj/coursenotes/homoral.html*

Rambo, E.F. 1932. 'On Homer's epithets', *The Classical Journal* 28, 128–130.

Roback, A.A. 1927. *The psychology of character, with a survey of personality in general*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Romilly, J. 1991. *"Patience, mon coeur!", L'Essor de la psychologie dans la littérature Grecque classique*, Paris: Société d'Edition Les Belles Lettres.

Runyan, W.M. 1997. 'Studying lives: Psychobiography and the conceptual structure of personality psychology', in R. Hogan, J. Johnson, & S. Briggs (eds.), *Handbook of Personality Psychology*, San Diego: Academic Press, 41–69.

Saucier, G., & Goldberg, L.R. 1996. 'The language of personality: Lexical perspectives on the Five-Factor Model', in J.S. Wiggins (ed.), *The Five-Factor Model of Personality: Theoretical Perspectives*, New York: The Guilford Press, 21–50.

Stamatakos, J. 1972. *Dictionary of Ancient Greek language*, Athens: Phoenix Editions.

Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary; Unabridged . 1979, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Whallon, W. 1965. 'ormulas for heroes in the "Iliad" and in "Beowulf" ', *Modern Philology* 63, 95–104.

Wiggins, J.S. 1973. *Personality and prediction: Principles of personality assessment*, reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Wood, R. 1971 (original edition 1769). *An essay of the original genius and writings of Homer*, New York: Garland.

Yiannacopoulos, P. 1992. *Homer, Iliad: Introduction, Translation* (*into modern Greek*), *Commentary* (6 Volumes), Athens: Cactus Editions.