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# The Original Storyteller: an Exploration of the Metanarrative Frame in Homer

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THE ORIGINAL STORYTELLER: AN  
EXPLORATION OF THE METANARATIVE  
FRAME IN HOMER

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Stories played a uniquely important role in ancient culture. Poetry, songs, and paradigms acted as living myths that had a function far beyond entertainment. They tied individuals together through a communal experience that perpetuated the values of the community. The most elevated form of story telling was epic poetry, which was performed orally by bards all over Hellas. *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* have survived as some of the only remaining examples of this epic poetry.

The primary function of most epic poems, including these two, was to sing the kleos of famous men. Kleos (κλέος) comes from the verb κλύω meaning to hear. Most basically it means the things that are heard. However, within the context of epic poetry it came to be a self-referential word that encapsulates the glory that the poet bestowed on a hero by immortalizing him in song. In the world of Homer warriors actively sought the immortality of kleos as a way to gain glory for their families and create for themselves an eternal life in the collective consciousness of the Greeks. It was achieved by performing horrifically magnificent acts on the battlefield and dying young in a blaze of honor. Kleos was imparted from father to son, and the only way for a son to add to the kleos of his family was to surpass the glory of his father and inspire his own set of stories. Kleos is innately metanarrative; it is a glory that does not exist without the story or the storyteller.

This being said *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* are concerned with far greater ideas than just kleos. Homer told the stories of particular heroes in these poems through a metanarrative framework in order to demonstrate that stories have a power and purpose that goes far beyond just singing the glory of any one man. By looking at the relationship that Telemachus, Achilles, and Hector have to stories over the course of these poems, we can begin to understand how Homer may have used these characters to present the idea

that stories are a powerful vehicle of learning. By giving individuals a perspective larger than their own, stories allow people to relate to one another.

## TELEMACHUS

*The Odyssey* is primarily the story of Odysseus' homecoming, however it also tells the coming of age story of his son Telemachus. Over the course of the poem, stories facilitate Telemachus' coming of age by giving him a new and much larger perspective that influences his actions and transforms him from a passive audience member to an active agent who inspires his own stories. By constructing Telemachus' journey in this way, Homer uses a metanarrative frame to comment on the ability stories have to teach by connecting individuals to a communal perspective. Telemachus directly represents the immense power words have in dictating the actions of men.

At the beginning of the poem, Telemachus is a boy isolated within his own perspective. The absence of his father has prevented him from understanding his place in the world and has kept him paralyzed in a passive role with no context to understand how to become an active agent. This passivity manifests itself in his inability to find a voice with which to fight for or even lay claim to the tangible and intangible inheritance of Odysseus. The first two books of the poem depict a Telemachus who conceptualizes himself as innately passive and powerless and who believes that he should simply be given the wealth and honor his father spent his life fighting for.

The audience is first introduced to Telemachus through his own thoughts and perspective as he sits brooding among the suitors who have taken over his father's halls:

“ὄσσόμενος πατέρ’ ἐσθλὸν ἐνὶ φρεσίν, εἴ ποθεν ἔλθων/ μνηστήρων τῶν μὲν  
σκέδασιν κατὰ δώματα θεῖη/ τιμὴν δ’ αὐτὸς ἔχοι καὶ δώμασιν οἴσιν ἀνάσσοι.”

(Homer, 1.115-117: ‘reflecting on his noble father, if perchance he should come from some place and disperse the suitors in his glorious house and take back his honor and his

own home.’) The language the poet uses in this first introduction illustrates that Telemachus is still a boy fantasizing that his father will save him, so that he does not have to take action himself. The action that Telemachus is doing in this moment is ὀσσόμενος, which is the present middle/passive participle from the verb ὄσσομαι. ὄσσομαι is derived from the word for eyes ὄσσε. This verb is distinct from the idea of mere memory; it is an attempt to describe the action of pictorial imagination. It is not that Telemachus is remembering his father but instead he is reflecting upon an image that he has created of a man who will solve all of his problems for him. He is a boy whose father left when he was very young and so he does not know him or understand the role of a father. He can only think of him within the context of this very childish idea that he will come home and make everything better without Telemachus having to take any action himself.

The poet uses ἔχου and ἀνάσσοι to describe the actions Telemachus hopes his father will come home and take. Both of these verbs are in the optative mood, this expresses the idea that this reflection is a mere wish and that Telemachus is not taking any active action in order to make this possible. He is a completely passive agent unable to step up and claim responsibility for anything, even his own home. In this passage he uses the pronoun ὅς to distinctly delineate that the palace is Odysseus’. He conceptualizes himself in such a passive way that even within his own head he cannot admit that his own home belongs to him.

As we begin to see in this first introduction, Telemachus’ passivity is directly related to the fact that Odysseus has never been a part of his life. His absence has prevented Telemachus from being able to understand his place in the larger world. This

idea is fleshed out in the first two books as Athena works to inspire him to take a journey to learn about his father and discover his fate.

In the first book when a disguised Athena asks Telemachus if he is really the son of Odysseus, he responds by saying, “μήτηρ μὲν τέ μέ φησι τοῦ ἔμμεναι, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ γε/ οὐκ οἶδ’· οὐ γάρ πώ τις ἐὼν γόνον αὐτὸς ἀνέγνω” (Homer, 1.215-216: ‘My mother tells me that I am, but I nevertheless do not know, for who yet knows certainly for himself his own descent.’) Telemachus hits on a very essential idea in his response. Children learn to define themselves through the way they experience their parents’ identities. Yet no person has any innate way of knowing who his parents are. It is something that he has to be told. This creates an inherently passive position for children for whom this aspect of their identity has to be externally derived. Telemachus has never had the opportunity to experience his father and struggles deeply to define his own identity.

Later in Book Two Athena expands on the reasons why it is important for sons to know their fathers. “παῦροί γάρ τοι παῖδες ὁμοῖοι πατρὶ πέλονται./ οἱ πλείονες κακίους, παῦροί δέ τε πατρὸς ἀρείου” (Homer 2.276-277: ‘For only a few sons become equal to their fathers, most become worse, and also only a few become better than their fathers’) In Greek culture men measured their worth in comparison to their fathers. A son could only add to the kleos of his family if he performed deeds greater than his father. Thus men measured themselves against their fathers. A boy like Telemachus, with very little knowledge of his father, had no way to judge his actions to know how he should act or the ways in which the world that did know his father would judge him.



Odysseus' absence has denied Telemachus the ability to define his own identity and paralyzed him in the mindset of a young boy. This is illustrated through his inability to take action and his belief that he not only does not have the power to claim and protect his inheritance but also that he does not need to because he is entitled to it and thus it should just be given to him. This can be seen in the way that he addresses himself to the assembly in Book Two, “ἦ τ' ἂν ἀμυναίμην, εἴ μοι δύναμις γε παρείη./ οὐ γὰρ ἔτ' ἀνσχετὰ ἔργα τετεύχεται, οὐδ' ἔτι καλῶς/ οἶκος ἐμὸς διόλωλε.” (Homer, 2.62-64: ‘yet I would ward them off, if the power were present in me. For moreover deeds have happened that are not endurable, nor moreover fair for my house has utterly perished.’) This passage shows that Telemachus' conception of himself is rooted in a place of complete passivity and powerlessness. He is outraged by the suitors' destruction of his home but he believes there is nothing he can do to stop it. He claims that he would ward them off if the power were present in him. The structure of this sentence illuminates just how Telemachus conceives of power and action at this point in the story. δύναμις, meaning power or might, is the nominative subject of the verb παρείη, which is the 3rd singular present optative form of the verb πάρειμι, which takes a dative object, which in this case is μοι. This structure is interesting for two reasons. The first is that the audience would expect him to say if he possessed the power he could do these things but instead the power is the subject and he is the object suggesting that he believes that he is the passive object which should be possessed by the active agent power. This structure implies that he believes there is nothing he can do to gain this power himself but instead it is something outside of himself that will one day take hold of him. The second illuminating aspect of this sentence structure is that the verb παρείη is again in the

optative and just as in the audience's first introduction to him, shows him expressing a wish without any active attempts to try and make it come true.

This belief that it is not in his power to protect his household can also be seen in the phrasing he repeats about the suitors each time he is asked about the affairs in his household, “τοὶ δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἔδοντες/ οἶκον ἐμόν: τάχα δὴ με διαρραΐσουσι καὶ αὐτόν” (Homer, 1.250-251: ‘But feasting they consume my house and soon they will also destroy me’) Again in this phrasing Telemachus is the object of all of the action and does not provide any space to suggest he could take an active role. The poet also chooses a very interesting and very loaded word to explain what the suitors are doing to Telemachus' household. This verb is φθινύθουσιν, which comes from the poetic form of φθίω meaning to perish or die. More specifically, the verb means to waste away, decay. Φθίω is a very complicated word in Greek literature/tragedy. It is related to the natural world and the wasting away/decay of plants. The life cycle of the hero was often framed in natural terms, such as this one. The alpha privative of Φθίω was used as the most common epithet with kleos: κλέος ἄφθιτον ‘everlasting glory’ or ‘unfading fame’. Using this verb in this context suggests that Telemachus understands that the suitors are not just wearing away at the physical possessions of his house but also the intangible things like the glory of his father and his ancestors.

Even though Telemachus acknowledges his own passivity and powerlessness, he does not seem to believe that he needs to take an active role because he believes he is entitled to his father's wealth and glory. This can be seen as he bemoans his predicament to Athena. “ἐπεὶ οὗ κε θανόντι περ ὦδ' ἀκαχοίμην./ εἰ μετὰ οἷς ἐτάροισι δάμη Τρώων ἐνὶ δήμῳ.../ τῷ κέν οἱ τύμβον μὲν ἐποίησαν Παναχαιοί./ ἠδέ κε καὶ ᾧ παιδί

μέγα κλέος ἦρατ' ὀπίσσω” (Homer, 1.236-241: ‘Since I would not have grieved for his dying so much, if he had been slain among his comrades in the land of the Trojans...Then all the Achaeans would have made him a tomb and he would received great glory for his son hereafter.’) In his childish way he thinks that he can passively live out his life and inherit the honor his father gave his life for. This idea represents just how disconnected Telemachus is from the values and ideals of Greek society. He fundamentally misunderstands kleos, the way that it is awarded and passed down. Throughout both *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* no character ever speaks about winning kleos for his son, but all characters speak of wanting to win kleos for their fathers. Telemachus does not understand the fundamental idea that motivates so many of the heroes in these stories. He does not understand that it is his duty to his father to go into the world and accomplish even greater things and add to the glory of their line. This is because he has never been a son to a father. He thinks that he does not have to take any action himself because he is entitled to the kleos of his father.

In Books Three and Four, Telemachus, inspired by Athena, sets out on a journey to learn the fate of his father. Over the course of this journey Telemachus meets two men who fought with his father at Troy, Nestor and Menelaus. These men tell Telemachus stories about his father, about themselves, and about the Greek army. These stories allow Telemachus to learn by giving him a perspective much larger than his own and connecting him not just to his father but also to the Greek community as a whole. This allows him to understand his identity within the context of his father’s legacy and the values of his larger community.

The stories that Nestor and Menelaus tell Telemachus about his father embody Odysseus' reputation among the Greeks. By explaining to Telemachus the perspective the rest of the community has on Odysseus, he is able to better define his identity and use the traits he has inherited from his father to the best of his ability.

In the beginning of Book Three, as Telemachus approaches Nestor's palace, he admits to Athena that he is intimidated by the king and unsure how to act. "Μέντορ, πῶς τ' ἄρ' ἴω; πῶς τ' ἄρ' προσπύξομαι αὐτόν;/ οὐδέ τί πω μύθοισι πεπεῖρημαι πυκνιοῖσιν;/ αἰδῶς δ' αὖ νέον ἄνδρα γεραίτερον ἐξερέεσθαι" (Homer, 3.22-24:

'Mentor, how should I go and how will I greet him? I have not yet made an attempt at crafty speech. And more over it is shameful for a young man to question an old man.')

This passage shows that Telemachus is still a shy young boy who does not know how to comport himself around his father's peers. He specifically uses the adjective *πυκνός* to describe the speech that he believes he has to use but has never before attempted.

*πυκνός* is an adjective that means craftily or shrewdly. This is a direct reference to Odysseus who is best known for his crafty way of words. Telemachus is recognizing in this moment that he has had no father to teach him how to address older men of a higher social status and that specifically he has had no Odysseus to teach him his wily ways.

However, his interaction with Nestor illuminates that his conception of himself may be false. While telling the story of Troy, Nestor praises Odysseus: "ἐπεὶ μάλα πολλὸν ἐνίκᾳ δῖος Ὀδυσσεὺς/ παντοίοισι δόλοισι" (Homer, 3.121-122: 'since godlike Odysseus far excelled in all manner of wiles'). Here Nestor is saying that Odysseus stood above all of the other Greeks in all manner of wiles. The word he uses for wiles is *δόλος*. The literal meaning of *δόλος* is bait particularly for a fish. The more figurative meaning

is anything deceiving, crafty, or wily. In this moment Nestor is describing Odysseus' reputation among the Greeks and his ability to use words to be crafty and set a trap. He is praising his ability to use words to trick men into action. In fact, the dictionary entry for this word also specifically uses the Trojan horse, which was Odysseus' idea, as an example to illuminate its meaning. Thus the word is in a way part of Odysseus' immortalization and glory.

Immediately in the next line Nestor connects Telemachus to his father by pointing out that he, too, possesses these qualities that the Greeks praise in Odysseus above anyone else. “σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα./ ἦ τοι γὰρ μῦθοί γε εἰκότες, οὐδέ κε φαίης/ ἄνδρα νεώτερον ὧδε εἰκότα μυθήσασθαι” (Homer, 3.123-125: ‘Amazement posses me as I look at you. For your speech is just like his, nor would you think that such a young man could speak in a way so similar to his.’) Nestor uses a very similar phrase to describe Telemachus as Telemachus used to describe himself when he was first approaching Nestor: “ἄνδρα νεώτερον” (a young man). However, Nestor perverts Telemachus' perception of himself by praising the very quality Telemachus feared he does not have because he is so young. Nestor is also contextualizing Telemachus within Athena's comments about fathers and sons by saying his actions make him *ἕοικα* (just like) his father. In this way he is helping Telemachus define his identity in the context of his father and the community's expectations of his father.

When Telemachus visits Menelaus, he, too, extols the glorious traits of Odysseus and praises him above all other Greek men. “ἦδη μὲν πολέων ἐδάην βουλήν τε νόον τε/ ἀνδρῶν ἠρώων, πολλήν δ' ἐπελήλυθα γαίαν:/ ἀλλ' οὐ πω τοιοῦτον ἐγὼν ἴδον ὀφθαλμοῖσιν./ οἶν Ὀδυσσῆος/ ταλασίφρονος ἔσκε φίλον κῆρ” (Homer, 4.266-270:

‘Before this I have known the counsel and the mind of many heroic men, and I have sought advice in many lands, but up to this time I am yet to behold in my mind’s eye anyone such as Odysseus of patient mind.’) Menelaus is connecting Telemachus to the larger community by outlining his father’s reputation across all of Hellas. This is seen in the fact that he uses one of Odysseus’ epithets to describe him, *ταλασίφρονος*.

Menelaus is calling on the culturally accepted description of Odysseus to explain his character to his own son. Without his father Telemachus has been isolated in Ithaca. By telling these stories that depict Odysseus as not only a well known, but also highly renowned, member of this larger Greek community, Menelaus is defining for Telemachus what he should strive to accomplish himself. Menelaus especially praises Odysseus’ ability to advise, saying he has known the *βουλή* (council) of many other men and none compare to Odysseus. Just as Nestor praised Odysseus’ ability to use words to trick men into action, Menelaus too is praising Odysseus’ ability to use words to influence the actions of other men.

As well as stories of his father, Nestor and Menelaus tell Telemachus the stories of other Greeks, including themselves. These stories tie him to the larger community and help him contextualize himself in within the value system that he has had little exposure to.

This can be seen in his interactions with Nestor who tells him the story of the Greeks at Troy. This story is told in such a way that it shows Telemachus that the Greeks are a people of action who fight for what is theirs, “ὦ φίλ’, ἐπεὶ μὲν ἔμνησας οὐζύου, ἦν ἐν ἐκείνῳ/ δῆμῳ ἀνέτλημεν μένος ἄσχετοι υἱεὶς Ἀχαιῶν” (Homer, 3.103-104: ‘My friend, since you put in my mind the sorrow, which we, the sons of the Achaeans,

irrepressible in strength, endured in that land'). Nestor is consciously connecting Telemachus to the group of people who fought at Troy by referring to them as υἱεὺς Ἀχαιῶν (the sons of the Achaeans). This way of delineating the Greeks includes Telemachus because he too is a son of the Achaeans. In making this connection Nestor is showing Telemachus the epic tradition that he is a part of and that he must carry forth. Nestor continues the story by saying, “εἰνάετες γάρ σφιν κακὰ ῥάπτομεν ἀμφιέποντες/ παντοίοισι δόλοισι, μόγις δ' ἐτέλεσσε Κρονίων” (Homer, 3.118-119: 'For nine years we were consumed plotting ruin for them [The Trojans] by means of all sorts of guile, and only after toil and pain did the son of Cronos bring it to pass') In telling this story and implying that it is Telemachus' cultural inheritance, he is offering Telemachus the idea that only with action, toil and pain were the Greeks able to win back what was theirs. Even though they were fated to win, Zeus would not give them anything without extreme action on their parts.

Both Nestor and Menelaus tell the story of Menelaus' journey home from Troy and the destruction of his brother's house. This story helps to illustrate to Telemachus the importance of protecting his household. It also helps him to understand that there are things beyond wealth that define a household and must be protected.

Nestor is the first one to tell Telemachus the story of the house of Atreus. After he describes in detail the events that occurred after Agamemnon and Menelaus returned from Troy, he concludes the story with a moral for Telemachus: “καὶ σύ, φίλος, μὴ δηθὰ δόμων ἄπο τῆλ' ἀλάλησο./ κτήματά τε προλιπὼν ἄνδρας τ' ἐν σοῖσι δόμοισιν/ οὕτω ὑπερφιάλους, μή τοι κατὰ πάντα φάγωσιν/ κτήματα δασσάμενοι, σὺ δὲ τηῦσιν ὁδὸν ἔλθῃς.” (Homer, 3.313-316: 'so do not, my friend, for a long time

wander at a distance from home, while forsaking your possessions and the arrogant men in your home, lest they devour your possessions, dividing them among themselves, making the journey you have undertaken be in vain.’) In this conclusion Nestor warns Telemachus against what he has repeated over and over again he fears will happen, that the suitors will consume all of his possessions. However, for the first time Nestor makes it clear that it is Telemachus’ duty to stop this. By comparing him to Menelaus he implies that Telemachus has the same strength and power as this great king to stop the men usurping the household of his family.

When Menelaus mentions this same story to Telemachus, he tells him that there is more to a household than just wealth. He explains that he added to the fortune of his house but in exchange, he failed to save the life of his brother and, “ὡς οὐ τοι χαίρων τοῖσδε κτεάτεσσιν ἀνάσσω” (Homer, 4.93: ‘Thus there is no joy in being master of this wealth’) Menelaus is trying to show Telemachus that as a master there are things that you must protect that are more important than wealth. He tells Telemachus that there is no joy ἀνάσσω (in being master). ἀνάσσω is a verb that means to be lord, or master, or just to rule. All of these words generally imply having control over people and not just wealth. A master, a lord, and really anyone that rules has a kind of unwritten contract with their people that they will be subject to the ruler’s authority and in exchange they will be protected. Menelaus is teaching Telemachus through this story that this is the duty of rulers and that he can find no joy in ruling, even when he has so much wealth, because he failed in protecting the person he cared about most.

The final story that Telemachus hears over the course of his journey is about Orestes and Agamemnon. Beginning before he even leaves Ithaca, multiple figures



compare him to Orestes who recently won glorious fame throughout the Greek world by killing the man who murdered his father. This story again connects him to a larger cultural tradition and educates him on the values that define Greek society.

This occurs first during Book One when Athena attempts to inspire him to set out on his journey. After she mentions Orestes' brave actions she tells Telemachus, “καὶ σὺ φίλος, μάλα γάρ σ' ὀρώω καλόν τε μέγαν τε./ ἄλκιμος ἔσσ', ἵνα τίς σε καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἐν εἴπῃ” (Homer, 1.301-302: ‘For I see that you also, my friend, are exceedingly beautiful and tall, be brave so that you will be spoken of well by men who are yet to be born). Greeks believed that physical strength and beauty directly related to nobility and honor. Here Athena is telling Telemachus that he is of noble birth and so has inherited all that he needs to achieve great glory, all he needs to do for men down the ages to speak his name. The only thing that he has to do to accomplish this is to take action and to “ἄλκιμος ἔσσ'” (be brave). He cannot inherit honor the way that he wishes but he has inherited everything he needs to achieve honor for himself if he can simply act.

In Book Three Nestor expands on the ideas that Athena mentioned in passing and tells Telemachus about the brave acts Orestes carried out in order to take revenge against the man who murdered his brave father. After finishing this story he repeats the same exact phrase as Athena: “καὶ σὺ φίλος, μάλα γάρ σ' ὀρώω καλόν τε μέγαν τε./ ἄλκιμος ἔσσ', ἵνα τίς σε καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἐν εἴπῃ” (Homer, 3.199-200: ‘For I see that you also, my friend, are exceedingly beautiful and tall, be brave so that you will be spoken of well by men who are yet to be born.) Nestor is offering the same exact advise as Athena. He hopes that in telling Telemachus this story that has so many parallels to his own life,

He can inspire him to take action and live up to the expectations that the community has for the son of Odysseus.

Along his journey Telemachus acts as a passive audience member listening to the stories that Nestor and Menelaus tell him. These stories give a new understanding of his father, the values of his community, and most importantly himself. They motivate him to action and inspire him to become an active agent and the inspiration for future stories. This growth can be seen as he finds his voice and uses it to claim the wealth of his household and fight for the glory of his father.

This process begins at the end of Book Four. After Telemachus finishes hearing the stories, he addresses Menelaus, “τὸν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἦῤα” (Homer, 4.594: ‘Telemachus opposing him with new found prudence said’). Telemachus’ interactions with Nestor and Menelaus have given him “αὖ πεπνυμένος” a new prudence. πεπνυμένος, is the perfect participle of πέπνυμαι, which literally means to be conscious or in full possession of one's faculties and in a metaphorical sense to be wise, prudent, sage. Thus this verb suggests that in a very literal way Telemachus has gained a new wisdom by being conscious of himself and taking control of his abilities and the way that he comports himself in the world. This newfound prudence allows Telemachus to directly oppose Menelaus. The adjective the poet uses for oppose is ἀντίον from ἀντίος, which means set against, or opposite, especially in the context of battle. In this moment Telemachus’ wisdom gives him the strength and ability to oppose Menelaus’ will. Although this is an amicable exchange this adjective gives it the sense that Telemachus now has the ability to oppose a great king like Menelaus and to face him on equal ground.

Menelaus' response equally illuminates the change that has come over Telemachus. "αἵματός εἰς ἀγαθοῖο, φίλον τέκος, οἷ' ἀγορεύεις" (Homer, 4.611: 'You are of noble blood, dear boy, in so much as you speak in such away'). Menelaus tells Telemachus that his words are proof of his noble blood. Both Nestor and Menelaus mention Odysseus' ability to speak well when describing him, and in fact, the stories they tell extol his cunning over his valor (3.120-122 and 4.250). Odysseus is a superb fighter but he is even more famous for his crafty ability with words. Telemachus has found the strength and agency to take up his father's noble traits and solidify his identity as his noble son among the leaders of his larger community.

In Book Fifteen, when Telemachus' story is revisited again for the first time, he uses his newfound voice to take action in his life. This new power combined with the new understanding that Menelaus' story has given him, allows him to realize that it is his duty to go home and protect his home and his wealth. "βούλομαι ἤδη νείσθαι ἐφ' ἡμέτερ': οὐ γὰρ ὄπισθεν/ οὐρον ἰὼν κατέλειπον ἐπὶ κτεάτεσσιν ἐμοῖσιν:/ μὴ πατέρ' ἀντίθεον διζήμενος αὐτὸς ὄλωμαι./ ἢ τί μοι ἐκ μεγάρων κειμήλιον ἐσθλὸν ὄληται" (Homer, 15.88-91: 'I wish to go to my home at once, for when I departed I did not leave behind a guardian with my possessions, lest I, while seeking my godlike father, may perish myself, or some goodly heirloom from my halls may be destroyed.') This represents a marked change for Telemachus. It again demonstrates the new strength in his voice. Where he was once afraid that he would not be able to address a king, he is now able to directly contradict one. He is speaking against what Menelaus said and advocating for his own wishes. He even uses the adverb ἤδη to make his meaning even more emphatic stressing that he wishes he was already home.

This passage also represents a marked shift in the way that he conceptualizes his possessions. In this speech he refers to them as *κειμήλιον*, which means possession, but more specifically, heirloom. In this moment Telemachus recognizes that his possessions are essentially heirlooms, but that does not mean they are not his and that he does not need to protect them. He is now at a place in his life where he can claim the things that are his because he is ready to take action in order to protect them.

Telemachus continues to assert his newfound identity through powerful speech after he returns to Ithaca. When he returns he is no longer the meek boy who silently lets other men take over his father's halls. He has a new confidence and reprimands the suitors with the grace and command of a prince. The suitors are absolutely shocked by this change, “ὡς ἔφαθ', οἱ δ' ἄρα πάντες ὀδᾶξ ἐν χεῖλεσι φύντες/ Τηλέμαχον θαύμαζον, ὃ θαρσαλέως ἀγόρευε.” (Homer, 18.411-412: ‘So he spoke and they all bit their lips with their teeth and marveled at Telemachus, who spoke so boldly’). Again Telemachus' newfound strength is demonstrated through his command of words. He is now able to actively control the suitors just by using harsh words. They are shocked by the *θαρσαλέως* of his words. *θαρσαλέως* is an adverb that comes from the noun *θαρσος*, which means boldness or confidence. Telemachus' journey of hearing has given him the confidence to assert his identity as the prince of Ithaca and the inheritor of the halls into which the suitors have weaseled their way.

Telemachus uses the power of his new voice to reprimand the suitors but also to protect his household. Within the context of the stories he heard, Telemachus is able to reframe his understanding of what constitutes his house and to take responsibility for protecting not just the wealth but also the men in his home. This can be seen when

Telemachus protects a disguised Odysseus from the taunts and blows of the suitors and tells them, “ἐπεὶ οὐ τοι δῆμὸς ἐστίν/ οἶκος ὄδ’, ἀλλ’ Ὀδυσῆος, ἐμοὶ δ’ ἐκτήσατο κείνος./ ὑμεῖς δέ, μνηστῆρες, ἐπίσχετε θυμὸν ἐνιπῆς/ καὶ χειρῶν, ἵνα μὴ τις ἔρις καὶ νείκος ὄρηται.” (Homer, 20.264-267: ‘Since this is not a public place, but the house of Odysseus, which that man won for me, and you suitors hold back your minds from rebukes and blows, so that no strife or feud may rise up.’) Once again Telemachus is speaking with great strength and commanding the actions of the suitors. He is telling them what they can and cannot do in his house. By forbidding suitors from fighting, he is protecting his household by ensuring the safety of the people that constitute it. This shows that his understanding has grown. Menelaus’ story allowed him to realize that a household is more than just its wealth. He refers to his house as a δῆμὸς (public place). This word essentially means belonging to the people. By using this word he is finally laying claim to his own home. He is making the distinction that it is a private property in which he, as the owner, defines the rules. He is now able to simultaneously acknowledge that he has inherited his wealth from Odysseus (“οἶκος ὄδ’, ἀλλ’ Ὀδυσῆος, ἐμοὶ δ’ ἐκτήσατο κείνος”) while also staking his own claim and right to protect it.

Telemachus’ final change is marked by his final appearance in the poem. As he and Odysseus prepare for the ominous battle to come, Odysseus challenges his courage and Telemachus responds defiantly: “τὸν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΰδα:/ ὄψαι, αἶ κ’ ἐθέλησθα, πάτερ φίλε, τῶδ’ ἐπὶ θυμῶ/ οὐ τι καταισχύνοντα τεδὸν γένος, ὡς ἀγορεύεις.” (Homer, 24.510-512: ‘Telemachus opposing him with new found prudence said: you will see me, if you are willing, dear father, not bringing disgrace on your kin, even as you say.’) As Telemachus opposes the challenge of his father, the poet

uses the same exact wording he used when he spoke to Menelaus. Telemachus is summoning his newfound tact to address his father in equal measure. His voice is now equal to his father's and he is now equally an agent in their family's great story.

He is now a man who is able to see his identity and purpose in the context of the values and needs of his kin. He has the courage that Athena and Nestor told him he needed and is now able to become an agent of his own story. He is ready to face incredible odds and fight harder than he has ever fought in his life in order to achieve glory for himself and his father. This is the exact inverse of the beginning when he wished his father would win glory for him.

*The Odyssey* is the story of Odysseus' journey home, but it is also the story of Telemachus' journey into manhood. This journey is facilitated by stories. These stories teach him by connecting him to a perspective larger than his own. They transform him from a passive boy with no voice to an active man who has the power to claim and protect his household and fight to gain glory for his father. This journey is a metanarrative frame that allows Homer to comment on the power of stories and storytellers. Ultimately the power that stories give Telemachus is the power to use his words to influence the actions of others. In this way he embodies the power that Homer, himself, had to influence the action of men through words.

## ACHILLES

*The Iliad* is the story of the rage of Achilles. This rage causes Achilles to become alienated from the Greek army and to question the way that he previously defined the relationship between himself and his community. In the beginning of the poem, he believes that it is the duty of individuals to protect and preserve their community but cannot conceptualize this idea in a way that does not prioritize his own needs. This understanding evolves throughout the poem as stories give him the ability to step outside himself and connect to a larger perspective than his own. These stories allow him to learn that in order to truly preserve and protect the community one has to be able to value something greater than the individual self. In the end his new understanding brings him to a place where he is able to connect with others in a profoundly different way. The metanarrative frame of Achilles' journey takes the point Homer made with Telemachus one step further. Achilles represents the idea that stories have an immense power to teach us not only about ourselves, but also about the way we relate to others.

In the world of Homer, men's lives were dictated by a set of morals and values that guaranteed the protection and perpetuation of the community. Achilles, as one of the greatest Greek warriors, used these values to dictate the way that he conceptualized himself and his relationship to his community. In the beginning of the poem, he believes that these values mean it is his duty to fight tirelessly in defense of the Greek army and that in return he is entitled to great honor and wealth. In Book One he becomes alienated from this community when he believes that Agamemnon is preventing him from having his needs met by using these values for personal gain to the detriment of the community.

This alienation causes him to question his identity and purpose in relation to his community.

The conflict in the first book is driven by Achilles' belief that Agamemnon has perverted the values that structure their society and has denied him the basic rights these values guarantee. In the ancient world spoils were the physical manifestation of kleos that affirmed the social and political order through the way that they were awarded. They functioned as both a physical and symbolic incentive for Greek warriors to fight gallantly because they were a source of wealth and a representation of honor. In this moment Achilles and Agamemnon are disagreeing over what is *ἔοικα*, meaning what is fitting, right, or proper. Both men use variations of this word when commenting on what is the right course of action to take in regards to the distribution of spoils. Their differing opinions reflect the ways that they conceptualize the world and themselves.

Agamemnon begins the disagreement by saying, “*αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γέρας αὐτίχ' ἐτοιμάσατ' ὄφρα μὴ οἶος/ Ἀργείων ἀγέραςτος ἔω, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ ἔοικε*” (Homer, 1.118-119: ‘Nevertheless provide for me a gift of honor at once in order that I alone of the Argives am not uncompensated since that would not be proper’). Agamemnon is trying to both save-face in front of the army and to preserve his personal wealth and honor. The word he uses for ‘gift of honor’ is *γέρας*. This noun is the gift of honor that kings and princes received before the spoils were divided up among the men. He is asking for the privilege of spoils based on his rank and position, not because of his skill or strength in battle. He believes that his social position entitles him to whatever he wants. He does not care that taking someone else's spoils would greatly dishonor them. This is because he is only thinking about his own honor and how he can use the system to protect his own



reputation and wealth. He believes that it is οὐδὲ ἔοικε for him, as the commander, to be denied what was given to the rest of the men. He believes that the only proper course of action is for the men to provide him at their own expense.

He believes he is entitled but Achilles disagrees with this understanding of the distribution of spoils and responds to Agamemnon by saying, “ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν πολίων ἐξεπράθομεν, τὰ δέδασται./ λαοὺς δ’ οὐκ ἐπέοικε παλίλλογα ταῦτ’ ἐπαγείρειν” (Homer, 1.125-126: ‘whatever we took by sacking cities was divided among the men and it is not proper to collect it back again’). Achilles believes that Agamemnon is not anymore entitled to the spoils of war than the men of the fleet. As a direct contradiction to Agamemnon’s beliefs, he thinks that it is οὐκ ἐπέοικε for Agamemnon to dishonor the men of his army for his own benefit. Achilles is looking out for the good of the whole community at the expense of Agamemnon as an individual. Achilles explicitly believes that Agamemnon’s actions are detrimental to the community. In his final speech during this confrontation Achilles refers to Agamemnon as “δημοβόρος βασιλεὺς” (Homer, 1.231: ‘People-devouring king’). Devouring is an action that destroys whatever is being devoured while simultaneously nourishing whatever is doing the devouring. Achilles is insulting Agamemnon by saying that he is a king who grows fat on the nourishment of his peoples’ destruction.

As Agamemnon continues to demand a new prize, Achilles spells out his belief that Agamemnon is perverting the values that structure the order of their society. “ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πλείον πολυαίικος πολέμοιο/ χεῖρες ἐμαὶ διέπουσ’ : ἀτὰρ ἦν ποτε δασμὸς ἴκηται./ σοὶ τὸ γέρας πολὺ μείζον” (Homer, 1.165-167: ‘My hands undertake the majority of the furious battle, nevertheless if it comes time to divide the spoils, your gift

of honor is much bigger”). Achilles seems to believe that honor and wealth are not an entitlement, but that those who accomplish the most in battle should be given the most wealth and honor. This belief helps to support and perpetuate the community because it honors those who give the most to the community, those who are most integral to protecting it. It provides both incentive for warriors to defend their communities and, in doing so, helps to define the relationship between the individual warrior and the community. This interaction has exposed to Achilles that Agamemnon is ruling a society in which this is not valued. For Agamemnon there is no distinction between what is earned by a warrior’s actions and what should simply be given to him because he is a king.

Along with believing that Agamemnon is perverting the values that define the facilitation of honor through spoils, Achilles also believes that these actions contradict the culture of shame that shaped the choices of men in ancient Greece. Achilles expresses this belief to Agamemnon in Book One, “ὦ μοι ἀναιδείην ἐπιειμένε κερδαλέοφρον” (Homer, 1.149: ‘Ah me, You are clothed in shamelessness and greedy for gain’) ἀναιδείην is the alpha privative derived from the verb αἰδέομαι, which means to be ashamed, to feel shame, or to have fear of a bad opinion. In ancient Greece shame was a positive emotion. It was one of the key values that protected the community by promoting restraint in individuals. The fear of public disapproval and disgrace prevented men from acting in a manner that would damage themselves and, more importantly, their community. Achilles is claiming that Agamemnon lacks shame and is acting only with his own greedy intentions in mind. Achilles believes Agamemnon is refusing to engage with the restraint that preserves the boundaries between individuals as they interact

within their community. This refusal to function within the same value system as the rest of the army is driving Achilles' anger towards Agamemnon. Ultimately it causes his complete alienation from the community and his withdrawal from battle.

Achilles' confrontation with Agamemnon is driven by his belief that it is an individual's duty to work to maintain the community. However, this concept does not preclude the idea that in return the community owes the individual. Achilles' initial understanding of his identity in relationship to his community can be understood further by looking at his description of himself in Book Nine when the embassy comes to visit. “ἐπεὶ πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῶ/ αἰεὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν παραβαλλόμενος πολεμίζειν/ ὡς δ' ὄρνις ἀπτήσι νεοσσοῖσι προφέρησι/ μάστακ' ἐπεὶ κε λάβησι, κακῶς δ' ἄρα οἱ πέλει αὐτῇ” (Homer, 9.321-324: ‘Since I suffered pain in my heart, always exposing my life to war. Just as a mother bird offers her beak, with whatever she can seize, to her unfledged chicks, while she by her own doing becomes ill.’) This metaphor shows that Achilles sees himself as a caretaker of the community. He believes that he is like a mother bird and the rest of the army are his chicks. He describes them as ἀπτήσι, meaning unfledged or un-winged. This adjective implies that he believes that just as baby birds do not have the physical capability to keep themselves alive without their mother, the army does not have the physical capability to keep themselves alive without Achilles.

This metaphor exposes both his belief that his identity in relationship to the community is that of a caretaker to helpless creatures and that this relationship is only one sided and is not meeting his needs. Achilles says that the mother bird gives her chicks whatever she can seize. The verb he uses for seize is λάβησι from λαμβάνω, which, in a general sense, means to take or seize. This verb has particular connotations in

the context of war and specifically can mean to take by force or to carry off as a prize or spoil. This verb directs the listener to the actual meaning that Achilles is alluding to. As a warrior, Achilles has been trained to fight ceaselessly for his community and in return been guaranteed the honor of spoils and everlasting glory of kleos. He believes that he is putting the needs of the community above his own and instead of being rewarded he is being denied something he is entitled to.

This passage shows that Achilles initially defines his relationship to the community as that of caretaker. He acknowledges that an individual has a duty to their community. However, he cannot conceptualize this idea in a way that does not emphasize his own needs. He sees his own individual needs as just as important as the collective needs of the entire army. He puts his own individual life on par with the preservation of his entire community. He cannot step outside of himself and his own experiences to understand the larger picture.

The alienation that Achilles feels after his confrontation with Agamemnon forces him to question how he previously understood the world. Throughout the rest of the poem, stories and the ritual of storytelling allow him to negotiate this new tension. Stories allow Achilles to step outside himself and gain a greater perspective that gives him the ability to redefine his relationship to his community with an understanding that places the needs of the collective over the individual.

This process begins in Book Nine as Achilles continues to refuse to re-enter the battle. When the embassy arrives they find him sitting with Patroclus playing a lyre.

“τὸν δ’ εὖρον φρένα τερόμενον φόρμιγγι λιγείη/ καλῆ  
δαιδαλέη, ἐπὶ δ’ ἀργύρεον ζυγὸν ἦεν./ τὴν ἄρετ’ ἐξ ἐνάρων πόλιν  
Ἡετίωνος ὀλέσσας:/ τῆ ὅ γε θυμὸν ἔτερον, ἄειδε δ’ ἄρα κλέα  
ἀνδρῶν” (Homer, 9. 186-189, ‘and they found him delighting his spirit

with a clear toned lyre beautifully embellished, on which was a bridge of silver, this he took up from the spoils after he destroyed the city of Eetion, and there he delighted his soul and sang the famous deeds of men.’)

In this moment Achilles takes up the role of the bard. This position allows him to participate in his community through this culturally significant ritual that both challenges and perpetuates the value system that he is struggling with. This role also places him decidedly outside the community and provides him a perspective that is impossible to have when functioning within it. The last time the audience saw Achilles he was mad, absolutely consumed by rage. In this scene he seems to have been able to find solace in finding a way to be part of his community and its value system without directly engaging in it or having to interact with any individuals. The poet says that Achilles is delighting his θυμὸν. θυμός in a physical sense refers to the spirit or heart. The metaphysical definition is slightly more complicated. It refers to the seat of passion in the body, meaning the place where the strongest emotions of joy and grief come from, and in particular the seat of rage. It is the place that previously would have held the rage he felt because of the personal and ethical betrayal of Agamemnon that has fundamentally changed how he conceptualizes himself and his community. The song and the new perspective it represents literally soothes this part of his soul.

Significantly, Homer incorporated the history of the lyre into his description of it. The lyre is an ἐνάρων, the arms and trappings of a slain foe; spoils. Achilles cannot escape his identity as a warrior or the cultural practices that imbue significance into inanimate objects, such as this lyre, by calling them spoils and valuing them as the incarnation of honor. Achilles is using an instrument he gained through the destruction of another civilization. This complicates his position and reinforces his identity as a warrior

even as he is trying to reestablish himself. It is not the physical spoil that delights him but the music that the spoil makes and the connection to the larger community. By taking the role of the poet he is actively participating in perpetuating the kleos of other men. In this way, he is celebrating what he believes he is owed by the community. However, by taking part in this ritual he is also able to open himself up to a new perspective that begins to shift his thinking away from just himself.

This shift continues to take root as Phoenix attempts to use a moral paradigm to remind Achilles of the values of their culture in order to convince him to rejoin the battle. Phoenix hopes that by using this familiar ritual he can help Achilles use these values to understand his own relationship to the army. However, there is a gap between what Phoenix intends the story to do and the way that Achilles is able to understand it. This gap, as well as the story itself, adds yet another perspective and helps Achilles further articulate his changing understanding of himself in relation to his community.

Phoenix sets up this familial ritual of storytelling by establishing his paternal relationship to Achilles. As he explains to Achilles, “σοὶ δὲ μὲν ἔπεμπε γέρον ἱππηλάτα Πηλεὺς/ ἡματι τῷ ὅτε σὺ ἐκ Φθίης Ἀγαμέμνονι πέμπε/ νήπιον οὐκ εἰδόθ’ ὁμοίου πολέμοιο/ οὐδ’ ἀγορέων, ἵνα τ’ ἄνδρες ἀριπρεπέες τελέθουσι” (Homer, 9.438-441: ‘The old horseman, Peleus, sent me on the day when he sent you from Phthia to Agamemnon, a child then you still did not know leveling power of war nor the gathering in that place where men become distinguished.’) Phoenix is establishing his role as an authority figure to Achilles within the context of the heroic narrative. Phoenix was charged by Peleus to look after Achilles when they first sailed for Troy and to teach him the ways of war. This means that everything Achilles knows about war he has learned

from Phoenix in the last nine years. His perspective on war and the code of conduct of soldiers is limited to what he has learned while being at Troy under Phoenix's care and instruction.

Phoenix describes war as the place where men become ἀριπρεπῆς among those gathered. ἀριπρεπής, meaning very distinguished, comes from the verb πρέπω. Πρέπω is a verb that related to the physical action of being clearly seen doing something, of standing out, shining forth. Phoenix is emphasizing that war is the place where heroes gain honor by performing glorious acts that allow them to stand apart from the crowd and make their names known. Phoenix is asserting that his role was to teach Achilles how he could bring honor to his father as defined within the culture's expectations of a warrior and a son of king. In doing this he is underlining yet again that it is time for him to take on this role and help Achilles understand the right thing to do by his father and the community as a whole.

Phoenix continues, by mentioning his own story, to remind Achilles of their close familial connection and to motivate him to actually consider thoughtfully the story he is about to tell. “ὡς ἐπὶ σοὶ μάλα πολλὰ πάθον καὶ πολλὰ μόγησα./ τὰ φρονέων ὃ μοι οὐ τι θεοὶ γόνον ἐξετέλειον/ ἐξ ἐμεῦ: ἀλλὰ σὲ παῖδα θεοῖς ἐπιείκελ' Ἀχιλλεῦ” (Homer, 9.492-494: ‘So I have suffered very much and toiled a lot while being mindful that the gods would not bring to me a child of own: but it is you godlike Achilles that I have made like my son.’) With this line Phoenix references his own ‘myth’ that he was cursed with infertility after he slept with his father's mistress at the behest of his mother. Phoenix is mentioning his own story in order to share his suffering with Achilles and draw into both of their minds that intensely personal and important relationship that they

share. Phoenix literally refers to Achilles as his παῖδα, using familial language to contextualize their relationship.

By reminding Achilles of their relationship, Phoenix establishes the cultural and familial significance of this ritual and bestows his words with the authority of one from whom Achilles has learned in the past. Phoenix is asking Achilles to think about himself in the context of this perspective that represents not only Phoenix's own beliefs but also the beliefs that have been passed down through oral tradition generation by generation in their culture. In this way the story provides a perspective that is bigger than just the two of them. Although the story does not inspire Achilles to action in the way that Phoenix hoped, both the story and the processes of telling it help Achilles navigate the tension he is feeling between himself and his community.

Phoenix preferences the story by outlining the purpose of stories both in their culture generally and in this moment specifically. “οὕτω καὶ τῶν πρόσθεν ἐπευθόμεθα κλέα ἀνδρῶν/ ἡρώων, ὅτε κέν τιν' ἐπιζάφελος χόλος ἴκοι:/ δωρητοί τε πέλοντο παράρρητοί τ' ἐπέεσσι./ μέμνημαι τόδε ἔργον ἐγὼ πάλαι οὐ τι νέον γε/ὡς ἦν” (Homer, 9.524-528: ‘In this way we have learned of the fame of the men of old, of the heroes, who may have had violent rage come upon them and they, open to gifts, were brought around by persuasive words. I will remind you of the deeds of young men long ago.’) Culturally, stories function for the current generation as a way to carry forth the kleos of great men so they can live forever. For future generations, stories act as a way to teach lessons and inspire the action that defines the relationship between individual and community. Phoenix expresses this idea in the first line of this passage. In describing the act of storytelling, he uses the verb ἐπευθόμεθα from πεύθομαι. Πεύθομαι means to



learn, but more specifically, to learn something from a person or to hear. In their society, men learn how they should act by passing down the stories of their ancestors.

Each generation teaches the next through the stories they tell. Phoenix underlines this idea through the parallel phrases that frame this passage. He begins by saying that they learn from “τῶν πρόσθεν κλέα ἀνδρῶν” (the kleos of the men of old) and ends by saying he will remind Achilles of the “ἔργον νέον πάλαι” (the work of young men long ago). By juxtaposing these two phrases, Phoenix is emphasizing the idea that what was once long ago simply the deeds of young men is now the kleos, the glorious stories, of men who were old long ago. Phoenix is asking Achilles to listen to his story so that he can be connected to these past generations and learn from their triumphs and tribulations. In this way Phoenix accentuates the cultural purpose of stories so that both the content of the story and the act of telling it force Achilles to engage with his community.

Phoenix also explains in this passage how he believes this story should function specifically for Achilles in this moment. Phoenix does this again by juxtaposing phrases. Here he puts side by side the idea of “δωρητοί” (being open to gifts) “παράρρητοί τ’ ἐπέεσσι” (being persuaded by words). These words together allow the listener to understand that for the ancient heroes, spoils acted as an incentive but words were an actual mechanism through which they were convinced to change their minds. This seems to have a double meaning. Phoenix seems to be beseeching Achilles to follow the example of the ancient hero and let both the story and the words of the embassy convince him. He is implying that while Achilles should want the wealth offered by Agamemnon it is his words that will ultimately change his mind.

After this preface, Phoenix begins to tell the story of Meleager. Through this story Phoenix defines for Achilles the values and morals he believes Achilles should use to navigate his understanding of his relationship to the community. Meleager was a prince and a spectacular warrior who was the sole defender of his city. However, during a war with the Curetes, he became so enraged by his mother that he withdrew from battle and refused to fight. His people came to beg for his return offering lavish wealth and honor but in return, consumed by his rage, Meleager turned them down. It was not until his wife Cleopatra made a personal appeal to him on behalf of the suffering of their people that he returned to battle and destroyed the Curetes. This story has obvious parallels to Achilles' actions leading up to this moment. However, the most interesting part of the story is the conclusion that Phoenix draws at the end in order to inspire Achilles to what he sees is the right course of action. “ὡς ὁ μὲν Αἰτωλοῖσιν ἀπήμυνεν κακὸν ἦμαρ/ εἷξας ᾧ θυμῷ: τῷ δ' οὐκέτι δῶρα τέλεσσαν/ πολλά τε καὶ χαρίεντα, κακὸν δ' ἦμυνε καὶ αὐτῶς” (Homer, 9.597-599: ‘And so he warded off the Aetolians’ day of evil, yielding to his spirit, but no longer would they pay him with gifts both many and beautiful, even though he kept off the evil’) Phoenix explains that Meleager yielded to his spirit. The word he uses for spirit is again θυμός. In this way Homer is drawing a parallel between these two instances. The poet is implying that the same part of Achilles’ soul that was soothed by his own singing is the part that will draw him into battle once again. He is demonstrating that stories have had a profound emotional effect on him before. Phoenix is using this story to tell Achilles that he believes, just like Meleager, Achilles will eventually be convinced for personal reasons to re-enter the battle. He is trying to open up his perspective to show him that all men care about things beyond themselves, even

Achilles. Phoenix believes that when the right person appeals to Achilles in the right way he will be moved by his spirit to re-enter the battle. He is imploring Achilles to not give away the material wealth and honor when it is offered now because he trusts that at some point something will happen that will convince Achilles that there are reasons to fight that reach beyond the individual or the individual's duty to their community.

Achilles responds harshly to Phoenix because he does not understand what Phoenix is trying to tell him. He believes that Phoenix is still trying to use material wealth as the basis of his argument and that he believes Achilles should use the accumulation of wealth as the only determinate in his relationship to the community. “Φοῖνιξ ἄττα γεραῖε διοτρεφεῖς οὐ τί με ταύτης/ χρεὼ τιμῆς: φρονέω δὲ τετιμῆσθαι Διὸς αἴση” (Homer, 9.607-608: ‘Phoenix, elderly father cherished by Zeus, I have no need of this honor, for I understand that honor is a decree of Zeus’) This reaction means even more in the context of his previous statement, “οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ ψυχῆς ἀντάξιον οὐδ’ ὅσα φασὶν/ Ἴλιον ἐκτῆσθαι” (Homer, 9.401-402: ‘For me there is nothing worth just as much as my life even as much as they say that Ilios possesses’). Achilles is completely unable to hear the story the way Phoenix wishes him to. He is still only able to think about the story in the context of himself and what honor means to him. He no longer solely defines honor as material goods, but he still can only think in terms of what his community has to give him. He believes that there is nothing that he can give him that is worth his life. He is still valuing his own individual life over the collective even as these stories challenge his isolated perspective. He cannot see that Phoenix is making an argument for something bigger.

Ultimately Achilles does yield to his emotions and rejoins the battle when Hector kills Patroclus. This action allows him to take up his role within the community once more. However, a change has begun to come over him and begins to play out his role in the community differently. This can be seen in Book Twenty-Three when he hosts the funeral games for Patroclus. In doing this he is able to provide a recreational rest for the entire army and to take the role of caretaker for the army in a new way that also provides him with some emotional relief from the pain of losing Patroclus. His interactions with Nestor in this book show that he is beginning to give value to things outside himself. The story that Nestor tells him connects him to a larger perspective that allows him in the next book to be able to relate to others in a profoundly different way.

After the chariot races Achilles singles out Nestor, who is too old to compete, and awards him a prize. The prizes of the funeral feast functioned just as the spoils of war in ancient culture. They were the physical manifestation of honor and glory. By being the awarder of these prizes Achilles is buying back into the honor system, which he had so deplored earlier in the poem and thus buying back into the traditions and practices that award signifies to individuals in his community. However, the awarding of a prize that traditionally would not be given to a man who cannot compete shows that he has re-entered the community and re-engaged with their practices on his own terms. He now understands that there are other things besides strength and youth that can benefit the community. “δίδωμι δέ τοι τόδ’ ἄθλον/ αὐτως: οὐ γὰρ πύξ γε μαχήσῃ, οὐδὲ παλαίσεις/ οὐδ’ ἔτ’ ἀκοντιστὺν ἐσδύσει, οὐδὲ πόδεσσι/ θεύσει: ἤδη γὰρ χαλεπὸν κατὰ γῆρας ἐπέγει” (Homer, 23.620-623: ‘I give you this prize even though you will never fight with your fist, nor enter a javelin throwing contest, not race with

your feet, the difficulties of old age already weigh on you.’) Achilles lists all of the physical actions that Nestor can no longer do because of his old age but awards him a prize in spite of this. Achilles is choosing to honor the burdens of old age while also recognizing the respectability of the old. He is paying tribute to Nestor but also what Nestor represents. He seems to be acknowledging that he now understands that communities are protected by more than just the physical strength of young men.

After he is awarded this prize, Nestor tells Achilles a story from the glory of his youth when he had the strength to compete in such games and won honor and glory by destroying the competition in every event. In this moment he is sharing a piece of his own kleos of his own glory within his own story. He ends this tale by saying: “ὡς ποτ’ ἔον: νῦν αὖτε νεώτεροι ἀντιοόντων/ ἔργων τοιούτων: ἐμὲ δὲ χρὴ γήραϊ λυγρῶ/ πείθεσθαι, τότε δ’ αὖτε μετέπρεπον ἠρώεσσιν” (Homer, 23.643-645: ‘So I was then, but now again let younger men face deeds such as this, it is necessary for me to yield to mournful old age, furthermore at one time I distinguished myself as a hero) By recounting his own famous deeds at similar competitions Nestor is creating a direct parallel between the young Greek men competing today and himself along with the men of his generation who are all now old. This parallel references the cycle of generations within their community and the idea that as the old must yield to the young, the young must in turn take up this mantle and continue to tell the stories of past generations in order to understand their place in contemporary times. The individual men in these stories do not matter, they are all tied together across time and space by the same cultural values. The community survives far beyond any one life; it is the thing that is truly immortal. At this point in the story Achilles knows that he will never reach this stage of life and that he

has given this up for personal revenge and glory. However, Nestor is connecting to Achilles on a deeper level showing him how they are all a part of this larger heroic cycle that gives glory but in the end that is all. The old man can no longer participate in these cultural practices and it is for the next generation to carry on the tradition. In a world where all mortals die, be it because of old age or battle, this is only way to deal with the pain of being human. Achilles' acceptance this story shows that he is beginning to recognize that there are things bigger than the individual self.

Achilles' interaction with Priam in the final book of the poem illustrates that Achilles has gained a greater perspective that has changed not only the way that he is able to relate to his own community but also to the human community. Achilles and Priam are able to use stories to step out of their own perspectives and relate to each other through the pain of mortality. Ultimately, Achilles demonstrates how truly far he has come in his thinking by advising Priam to put away his own emotions so that he can preserve himself for the community that so desperately needs him.

When Priam first arrives in Achilles' tent he beseeches him to take pity on him by telling Achilles his own story and relating it back to Achilles' father. In doing this Priam forces Achilles to understand the world through his father's perspective instead of his own. “Ἀχιλεῦ, αὐτόν τ' ἐλέησον/ μνησάμενος σοῦ πατρός· ἐγὼ δ' ἐλεεινότερός περ” (Homer, 24.503-504: ‘Achilles, remembering your own father take pity on me, for I am more pitiable’) Priam uses the verb μνησάμενος to ask Achilles to remember his own father. This verb has the same etymology as the verb is used throughout Homeric poetry to refer to the action of Muses inspiring the poet. In using this verb Priam is asking Achilles to perform the same action as the bard. To open his mind so that he can truly

undertake an experience separate from his own. Priam is asking Achilles to reach beyond his own experiences and understand Priam through his own father. In this way Priam is opening up Achilles' perspective so that they can relate to one another through the grief they both share. This works as both Achilles and Priam break down, thinking about all that they have lost and are still yet to lose. These two sworn enemies are able to facilitate a peaceful conversation through the medium of storytelling. Ultimately it allows both of them to understand the other through a pain that is much greater than either one of their individual experiences.

After Achilles and Priam are able to find common ground by sharing in the pain of their grief, Achilles agrees to give Hector's body to Priam. However, Priam continues to lament his dead son and refuses to eat. Achilles implores him to join him for dinner saying, “ἀνσχεο, μὴ δ' ἀλίσστον ὀδύρεο σὸν κατὰ θυμόν:/ οὐ γὰρ τι προήξεις ἀκαχήμενος υἱὸς ἑήρος,/ οὐδέ μιν ἀνστήσεις, πρὶν καὶ κακὸν ἄλλο πάθησθα” (Homer, 24.549-551, 'be of good courage, and do not mourn incessantly in your heart, for grieving for your noble son will not achieve anything, nor will it raise him from the dead, and soon you will suffer something worse.')

Achilles understands that Priam is the leader of his city and now more than ever they need him to be strong. Achilles is telling Priam that he must take care of himself now and not submit to his emotions. Achilles and Priam both know that now that Hector is dead the fate of Troy is sealed. Priam will be the last king of Troy. Achilles is telling Priam that for this reason, Priam must put aside his individual need to grieve and take care of himself so that he can guide his community in the time of their greatest need.

Achilles is able to communicate this idea further to Priam by using the mythical paradigm of Niobe to explain that even in his grief Priam has to eat. Again, in this scene, stories act as a common language between these two men, who have each suffered so much because of the other. The fact that Achilles not only gives Priam this advice but also does it in this way shows how far he has come in his understanding. Achilles is able to understand that in order to truly serve as the caretaker of a community one must be able to sacrifice their individual needs and value something greater.

Achilles narrative, over the course of *The Iliad*, is defined by his alienation from his community and his struggle to find a way to define the relationship between himself and this community in a new way. The stories, that he hears and tells, allow him to negotiate this changing understanding and reach a place where he is able to step outside of his own perspective and see the collective as more important than an individual life. Stories provide for him a way to interact with people in the present, and a way for him to define future interactions. To this end, Achilles serves as a way for Homer to comment on the power of stories to help us relate to others not just in our own community but in the human community.



## HECTOR

If *The Iliad* is the story of Achilles' rage then it is also the story of Hector's defense. Hector's role as the defender of Troy, and its greatest hero, defines his entire identity through the values and expectations of his community. Over the course of the poem Hector never questions these motivations, and his conception of his identity and his relationship to his community never falter. For this reason he does not tell or hear stories in the same way that other characters do. However, all of his actions are driven by the anticipation of future stories and by the fear of what people will say about him after he is dead. These motivations and fears are ultimately thrown into contrast in the final scene when Hector's body is brought into the city and the audience hears the lamentations for him. The disparity between the way that Hector imagines the stories that will be told about him after his death and the stories that we actually hear again takes the point that Homer was making with Achilles one step further. Hector is the embodiment of Homer's critique of the genre. His narrative allows the listener to widen his or her perspective and learn that stories are ultimately bigger than anyone man. Stories allow people to come together and relate to one another by sharing in the human experience.

Hector is the embodiment of his community. He is the hero that it has raised to be its great defender, to protect and preserve the entire community. He does not need stories to explain to him his role in his community or define his identity because he and everyone else understand for certain what this is. This can be seen in the way that other characters describe him throughout the poem.

The first mention of Hector occurs in Book One as a part of Achilles' oath to withdraw from battle and his threat that this will cause the sons of Atreus and the entire

Greek army great pain. Achilles claims that on one day soon Greek men will be sorry: “εὐτ’ ἂν πολλοὶ ὑφ’ Ἑκτορος ἀνδροφόνοιο/ θνήσκοντες πίπτωσι” (Homer, 1.242-243: ‘when many dying fall down under man-killing Hector’). Here Achilles uses Hector as a stand-in for the violence and force of the whole Trojan army. Hector alone is the threat that will cause the Agamemnon to beg for Achilles’ return. He is the agent of Greek death. He is the Trojan force.

Another example of Hector’s identity as the defender of Troy is his son, who the audience is first introduced to in Book Six. “τόν ῥ’ Ἑκτωρ καλέεσκε Σκαμάνδριον, αὐτὰρ οἱ ἄλλοι/ Ἄστυάνακτ’· οἶος γὰρ ἐρύετο Ἴλιον Ἑκτωρ.” (Homer 6.402-403: ‘who Hector called Scamandrius, but who other men called Astyanax: for Hector alone protected Ilios.’) Astyanax is Hector’s only son and therefore his only heir. He is the physical embodiment of his father’s living legacy, and he has been given the name Astyanax, which in Greek is ἀστυάναξ and means lord of the city. The Trojans recognize and celebrate that Hector “οἶος” (alone) guards the city, that he is its sole defender. In this way they pass down the legacy of his identity within their community in his son’s name so that in a way his story is carried on through the mortal materialization of his line. In this way the community ties themselves to Hector by claiming his son.

Communities reward heroes for protecting the collective by performing certain deeds within a set value system, with the promise of immortality through stories. Although Hector does not need stories of the past to help him connect to or define the present, he does use the anticipation of future stories to influence and motivate his actions in the present. This anticipation takes two forms, of shame and an entitlement to glory. Both shame and glory are values that are externally derived and require an audience.

They determine how one is remembered and what kinds of stories are told after you die. For this reason Hector uses them as his constant motivation to keep fighting, as he lives his life ready to die and be brought back in song.

Hector, the greatest son of Troy, who has done everything his community has ever asked of him and always lived his life in accordance with their values, takes for granted the fact that he will get kleos. He assumes that his individual glory will extend far into the future. Again and again he references this idea as a justification to himself and others for why he must continue fighting ceaselessly even in the face of defeat.

This idea can be seen for the first time in Book Six when Andromache tries to convince him not to re-enter the battle. As he explains the forces that have always motivated him to fight he tells her that it has been his practice, “αἰεὶ καὶ πρότεροι μετὰ Τρώεσσι μάχεσθαι/ ἀρνύμενος πατρός τε μέγα κλέος ἠδ’ ἐμὸν αὐτοῦ” (Homer 6.444-445: ‘always to fight in front among the Trojans while striving to win great glory for my father and myself.’) Hector explains his motivation as the classic motivations of a warrior. He says that he always fought πρότερος (in front), meaning that he always chose to be on the front lines. This shows extreme courage and determination. However, he did not do this in order to protect his people, but because he knew this was the way to win kleos and have his name passed on. He names this as one of the things he has been taught throughout his life as a warrior. He is telling her how he knows he will be rewarded for his courage on the front lines.

In Book Seven Hector challenges the greatest Greek warrior to meet him in single combat. When no one steps forward he uses the idea of kleos and future stories to motivate them, “καὶ ποτέ τις εἴπησι καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἀνθρώπων/ νηὶ πολυκλήϊδι πλέων

ἐπὶ οἴνοπα πόντον:/ ἀνδρὸς μὲν τόδε σῆμα πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,/ ὄν ποτ’  
ἀριστεύοντα κατέκτανε φαίδιμος Ἴκτωρ./ ὡς ποτέ τις ἐρέει: τὸ δ’ ἐμὸν κλέος οὔ  
ποτ’ ὀλεῖται.”(Homer, 7.87-91: ‘and one day someone of those men yet to be born  
sailing a ship with many benches on the wine colored sea will say: “This is the grave of a  
man that died long ago, who in the prime of his life glorious Hector slew.” And my glory  
will never perish. ) This passage shows that there is no question in Hector’s mind that he  
will receive everlasting glory, and that for centuries to come men across the world will  
know his name. When he speaks the words he imagines men who have not been born yet  
will say when they tell this story, Hector uses “ἀνδρὸς” to refer to his opponent while  
calls himself by name. This juxtaposition shows his deep belief that his name will be  
remembered across all time while his opponent will just be another man that Hector  
slaughtered. He is offering them a chance to be a part of his story, of kleos. The way he  
presents this idea assumes defeat for the other side but allows for the compensation that  
they will be remembered because they will die at the hands of Hector whose individual  
glory will live on forever.

The final example of Hector’s belief that his individual kleos will always be  
remembered is during his death scene. In the moment he knows he will die he is able to  
steel himself by reminding himself of the everlasting glory that will be his if he continues  
to fight until his last breath. “νῦν αὐτέ με μοῖρα κιχάνει./ μὴ μὰν ἀσπουδί γε καὶ  
ἀκλειῶς ἀπολοίμην./ ἀλλὰ μέγα ῥέξας τι καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι. (Homer,  
22.303-305: ‘but now my death is inevitable. But truly let me not die without struggle  
and not without glory, but while accomplishing some great deed that men yet to be born  
will learn of.’) At this point Hector knows his death is inevitable. The word he uses to

express this is μοῖρα, colloquially this word means inevitable, but in a more literal sense it means one's lot in life, fate, or destiny. Hector is acknowledging not just that he knows that Achilles is about to kill him but that he knows that his lot is up, that it is his destiny to die in this moment. In a world where destiny was an absolute, this is the ultimate kind of fatalism. Still, facing what he knows is the absolute end, he is able to keep fighting because he also knows that stories will be told about this moment. He knows that he cannot let up and just let Achilles finish him because he has to consider what he wants the stories that are told about this moment to be about. This is the absolute last chance to effect what is said about him after he is gone, and so he keeps fighting even though he is dying.

The fact that Hector knows for certain there will be stories told about him makes him conduct his life in anticipation of these stories. For this reason he understands shame and the fear of what people will say about him as the greatest motivating factor. Throughout the poem he uses these motivations to inspire himself and others into action.

This can be seen in the interactions that Hector has with Paris. Twice in the poem Hector has to inspire Paris to rejoin the battle. He does this by appealing to him through the idea of shame. “πατρί τε σῶ μέγα πῆμα πόλῆί τε παντί τε δήμῳ./ δυσμενέσιν μὲν χάσμα, κατηφείην δὲ σοὶ αὐτῷ” (Homer, 3.50-51: ‘to your father and your city and all the people of the country you are a great calamity and to your enemies a source of delight and to yourself a shame’) In this passage Hector inextricably links Paris' actions and his very identity to the legacy of his father and his city. Hector used the word κατηφείην to describe what Paris has made of himself. Κατηφείην comes from κατήφεια meaning shame and more specifically a casting down of the eye, dejection. Thus it is the physical

action of shame, the inability to make eye contact with others because of the knowledge that you have done something that is reproached by public opinion. In using this word to insult Paris, Hector situated Paris' understanding of himself within his community's judgment of him. In doing this he has replaced a grand paradigm with the harsh reality of Paris' situation and yet managed to accomplish the same thing. He has situated Paris' identity in relation to the community in order to inspire him into action on their behalf. Instead of using the grandiose language of individual honor, he cited the harsh reality of communal shame. Without using stories Hector was able to situate Paris' identity within a communal framework and influence his understanding of his purpose.

Hector is forced to do this again in Book Six in order to motivate him to return to the battlefield. “λαοὶ μὲν φθινύθουσι περὶ πόλιν αἰπύ τε τείχος/ μαρνάμενοι: σέο δ' εἵνεκ' αὐτὴ τε πόλεμος τε/ ἄστυ τόδ' ἀμφιδέδηε” (Homer, 6.327-329: ‘the men are perishing all around the city and at the high and steep wall while fighting and it is on account of you that the battle cry and war are ablaze in this city.’) Here again we see Hector narrating the present in order to depict what will be lost and the tragedy and shame of this. In using the reality of the fate of Troy instead of a mythical paradigm he calls on the ideas of shame and loss instead of honor and gain. He stresses “σέο δ' εἵνεκ'” it is on account of Paris that war rages on getting closer and closer to the city. He is asking Paris to take responsibility for his actions. Paris responds that it is not out of fear that he has not returned to battle but out of grief. The very ideas that Hector has just referenced are the reasons why he has not yet returned. Paris, unlike Hector, has trouble finding strength in the doom of Troy. He is paralyzed by the pain and fear and needs his wife to coax him back into battle.

Hector also uses the shame of what people will say about him in the future to motivate himself. This is seen first in Book Six when Andromache tries to use her own story to convince him not to return to the battle, but he is unable to hear her story because he is too consumed by what people may say about him to her after he is dead. “ὥς ποτέ τις ἐρέει: σοὶ δ’ αὖ νέον ἔσσεται ἄλγος/ χήτει τοιοῦδ’ ἀνδρὸς ἀμύνειν δούλιον ἦμαρ.” (Homer, 6.462-463: ‘So at sometime someone will say, and for you again the pain will be fresh, lacking such a man who could have kept off your day of servitude.’) This passage shows just how concerned Hector is with the stories that will be told about him in the future. He explains too that he fears that one day someone ἐρέει (will say). ἐρέει is the future form of the verb ἐρέομαι. Hector uses this form to express his fears about actions that will be taken in the future. Thus he is exposing to Andromache that he conducts his life always considering how men will speak of him in the future.

Finally, in Book Twenty-Two when Hector’s resolve is shaken while waiting in front of the gates for Achilles he uses shame to talk himself down and recommit himself to the battle. “αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάδας ἐλκεσιπέπλους,/ μὴ ποτέ τις εἴησι κακώτερος ἄλλος ἐμεῖο:/ Ἐκτωρ ἦφι βίηφι πιθήσας ὄλεσε λαόν.” (Homer, 22.105-107: ‘I would have the shame of Trojan men and Trojan women dragging their robes, lest at that time some other baser man might say of me, “Hector persuaded of his own bodily force destroyed his own men”’) This passage shows Hector’s fear of shame in this moment and the fear of what some men might say about him at sometime in the future. The most interesting thing about this moment is that it is juxtaposed with the lines immediately above where all of the Trojans, but particularly Hector’s family, stand on the walls of Troy and beg him to come back within the walls. Even as he hears these shouts

and is overtaken with concern for his own life, nothing is stronger than his fear of what men will say about him. He is not afraid of what the people he knows will say about him, but what some people in some far off undefined time will say.

As we have seen, Hector is motivated by the anticipation of eternal individual glory. However, the anticipation of these stories does not match the laments the audience hears praising him after his death. When Priam brings his body back into the city, the women closest to him sing his laments. These stories glorify Hector but only in the context of their own doom and the fate of their city. In the end, the stories that Homer allows us to hear about Hector are not his individual glory but away for his community to come together and relate to one another through their shared pain and fear.

These laments begin when Cassandra, Hector's sister, sees Priam bringing back Hector's body. She calls on the entire city to witness his final re-entrance into the city. When she laments his return and calls out to the entire city to witness it, “ὡς ἔφατ', οὐδέ τις αὐτόθ' ἐνὶ πόλει λίπετ' ἀνήρ/ οὐδὲ γυνή: πάντας γὰρ ἀάσχετον ἴκετο πένθος” (Homer, 24.707-708: ‘So she declared, and neither any man nor any woman remained there in that city, for their grief had become irrepressible.) The city cannot physically restrain the grief of the Trojans at the sight of Hector's body. They rush forth all-together to share in their mourning for this great man. At this moment, when the whole city possesses this singular grief, we finally get to here the stories that Hector's whole life was spent in anticipation of.

Andromache begins and wails loudest and longest of all the women. Through her wails she is able to frame Hector's story in such a way that her individual loss for her dead husband embodies the emotions of the entire community. “πρὶν γὰρ πόλις ἦδε



κατ' ἄκρης/ πέρσεται: ἦ γὰρ ὄλωλας ἐπίσκοπος, ὅς τέ μιν αὐτήν/ ῥύσκει, ἔχεις δ' ἀλόχους κεδνάς καὶ νήπια τέκνα,” (Homer, 24.728-731: ‘For before that this city will be utterly sacked, for in truth you have perished who was its guardian and was able to keep safe its diligent wives and infant children.’) Andromache speaks in general terms about the role that Hector played as the guardian of the city. However, the way that she describes this role implies that she is also describing the individual role he played for her. She laments above all else that now there will be no one to protect the “ἀλόχους κεδνάς καὶ νήπια τέκνα” (diligent wives and infant children). She is speaking generally about the women and children of Troy. However, she chooses to use ἀλόχος meaning wife instead of γυνή, which simply means women. She also specifies that the children are νήπια (infants), like her son. In this way, she is tying herself to the collective grief of the city by using it’s situation now that Hector is gone as an allegory for her position now that her husband is gone. She takes this a step further directly linking the fate of Hector with the fate of Troy. She says that Hector was the ἐπίσκοπος (the guardian) of the city. ἐπίσκοπος, means guardian and implies the actual act of physically watching over something. She believes that he was the only physical barrier standing between the city and Greek army. Now that, he is gone their fate is sealed and she knows that everyone will suffer.

The final lament is from Hector’s sister-in-law Helen. Helen does directly the opposite of Andromache and uses her individual grief to relate to the grief of the community. She alone is not Trojan and is probably aware that if the city is sacked she will be protected by the Greek forces, who will want to bring her to Menelaus. However, she still mourns for him as her individual protector against the other members of court. She

describes him as her individual defender much in the same way that he is described as the defender of the city and in this way relates her individual grief to the grief of the collective. She along with each member of the community has lost their defender. She ends her lament by saying, “τὼ σέ θ’ ἅμα κλαίω καὶ ἔμ’ ἄμμορον ἀχνυμένη κῆρ” (Homer, 24.774: ‘Simultaneously I wail for both you and my unhappy self with grief in my heart’) By using the adverb ἅμα, Helen emphasizes that Her grief is at once for Hector’s death and also the vulnerable position that his death has left her in. This double grief is the grief of the entire city. By telling her own story in this way through this lament, she has created a direct link between herself and the Trojans and found a way to relate to them by accessing this shared pain.

Homer ends Hector’s story and the entire narrative of the poem with the final coming together of the entire Trojan community to bury their defender. “ὣς οἳ γ’ ἀμφίεπον τάφον Ἕκτορος ἵπποδάμοιο.” (Homer, 24. 804: ‘and so they honored the funeral rights of Hector, breaker of horses.’) In this way, Homer used Hector to show that these poems are so much more than the stories of anyone man. They show us that stories give us the ability to come together to share ourselves and our pain and that this can be more powerful than the grief and fear that come with being mortal.

*The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* have survived across time and space and continue to be considered two of the greatest literary works of all time. They represent the beginning of recorded storytelling in the western world. Even with these archaic roots the author of these poems was able to use his work to comment on the power and purpose of storytelling not just for individuals, but also for entire communities. He accomplished this by exploring the journeys of specific characters through a metanarrative lens. These characters critic the cultural purpose of stories simply as individual glory, and show that their function, above anything else, is as a vehicle of learning that has the power to directly inspire the action of men. By demonstrating the teaching power of stories he also able to open the perspectives of his audience to his larger lesson that story's provide compensation for mortality not by offering immortality but by allowing people to share the pain of mortality with others.