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A Killing Doom and Immortal Song:

Death and *Kleos* in Homer's *Iliad*

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sics 490: Senior Thesis

Professor Aislinn Melchior

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Zeus planted a killing doom within us both,
 so even for generations still unborn
 we will live in song.
 —Helen to Hector, *Iliad* 6.424-26

So now I meet my doom. Well let me die—
 but not without struggle, not without glory, no,
 in some great clash of arms that even men to come
 will hear of down the years!
 —Hector, *Iliad* 22.359-62

In these quotes, both Helen and Hector are referring to the Greek poetic concept of *kleos*. While the term is most commonly translated as “glory” or “fame,” *kleos* is also understood as “that which is heard,” conceptually emphasizing the inherently communal aspect of glory—fame is an audience speaking and hearing *about* an individual, not an intrinsic quality of that individual. To this end, *kleos* has a double meaning: it is both glory and the poem or song through which said glory is conveyed. The epic poems of Homer, particularly the *Iliad*, are arguably the most successful and explicit transmitters of *kleos* in the Greek tradition. The heroes of the Trojan War achieve *kleos* through acts of violence, either as perpetrators in glorious *aristeiai* or as victims who go to their deaths bravely and with dignity. Though they almost all lead short lives ending in brutal deaths, their names and deeds are immortalized in poetry.

Yet the Homeric epics also suggest a certain ambivalence towards *kleos*. In the *Iliad*, Priam claims that a young, glorious death in battle is far better than an undignified death at an old age (22.83-89). Contrarily, the *Odyssey* sees Achilles’ spirit claim that being alive under any

¹ Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 26. *Kleos* is also cognate with the English “loud,” both being derived from the Indo-European root meaning “to hear” (*Indo-European Cognate Dictionary*, s.v. “klew-”); to quote Brett Rogers, one of the readers who gave me feedback on this thesis, “Homeric heroes live ‘out loud,’ as it were.”

² Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, 26.

³ Seth Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer’s Iliad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 68.

circumstances is always preferable to dying, telling Odysseus, “[N]ever try to console me for dying. / I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another / man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on, / than be a king over all the perished dead.” (11.488-91). In other words, Achilles, who chose an early death in exchange for the greatest *kleos* of any hero, is saying that he chose wrong. *Kleos*, which Homer treats as a sort of immortality, is not a substitute for actually being alive.

In this paper, I aim to interrogate this ambivalent relationship between death and *kleos* in Homeric epic, specifically the *Iliad*. For clarity and ease of reading, I have divided my analysis into three sections. The first two sections essentially examine what it means to die in the *Iliad*: the first lays out the theoretical groundwork for understanding how and why the concept of *kleos* intersects with life and death, while the second outlines the relationship between the Homeric heroes and the violence inherent in their warrior culture. The final section focuses on what comes after death, examining how the *Iliad* uses *kleos* as a way of engaging with larger questions of grief, mortality, and impermanence. Ultimately, I argue that Iliadic *kleos* is meant to reassure its audience that human existence continues even though individual lives fade.

Before we begin, several critical notes must be made on my methodology. The first is an admission: I do not know Greek. All quotations from the *Iliad* and their associated line numbers are taken directly from Robert Fagles’ 1990 translation for Penguin Classics, while the *Odyssey* quote above comes from the Richmond Lattimore translation. I have made an effort to avoid personally making linguistics-based arguments; any evidence based on Greek vocabulary is wholly or predominantly taken from secondary sources written by scholars who read and

translate Greek, and my quotations from the *Iliad* are meant only to emphasize the general meaning conveyed by the quote without regard to specific word choice or connotations thereof.

The second note: the Homeric Question. For the purposes of this essay, I am referring to

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“Homer” or “the Homeric narrator” as a single person. In truth, however, my argument is compatible with any point of view that accepts that there is a deliberate architecture to the storytelling of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—that these two epics did not coincidentally organize themselves according to theme and character when the Epic Cycle did not do the same, that random chance is unlikely to explain why virtually none of the Trojan War episodes related by the *Iliad* are retold in the *Odyssey* and vice versa, that at some point there must have occurred a conscious

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intervention with the oral tradition in order to create such complementary works.

Finally, given that the *Iliad* is perhaps the definitive primary source for ideas of death and *kleos* in Greek heroism, it is necessary to limit my focus to particular episodes or elements of the work. As such, the majority of my analysis is concentrated upon the *kleos* and impending death of Achilles, as well as the deaths of Patroclus and Hector and their aftermath. It is hardly a stretch to say that these are the most narratively significant deaths of the *Iliad*: over a third of the text (Books 16 through 24) is devoted to describing and responding to Patroclus’ and Hector’s deaths, while Achilles’ swiftly approaching death and *kleos* cast a shadow over the entire poem. It is also appropriate to use Hector and Patroclus as a focal point because scholarship has demonstrated that the two are, to a certain extent, Homeric inventions; they are not major figures in myth outside of their roles in the *Iliad*, and the *Aithiopsis*, one of the lost works of the Epic Cycle, apparently related an alternate mythological tradition wherein Patroclus and Hector’s

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Irene J. F. de Jong, “The Homeric Narrator and His Own *Kleos*,” *Mnemosyne* Fourth Series 59, no. 2 (2006): 189.

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 10-13, 18, 37-38.

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roles in relation to Achilles were instead filled by the characters Antilochus and Memnon. This suggests that, even more than the other characters of the poem, Hector and Patroclus are used as tools by the Homeric narrator to explore and question the themes presented by the larger mythic

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tradition from which the *Iliad* is derived.

Part I. The Material and Immaterial

The idea of soul versus body in the works of Homer is a messy chicken-and-egg debate spanning over half a century of academia; the shortest summary I can offer is that delineating the idea of the physical body arguably implies the concept of something *other* than the physical body (i.e., the soul) and scholars are divided on whether or not the *Iliad* contains such a duality as it

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pertains to living people. Rather than taking a side in this debate, I propose a broader and more flexible dichotomy which juxtaposes the idea of the material world—bodies, yes, but also food, clothing, anything involved in physically maintaining life—versus the immaterial world of souls and *kleos*. The material world can also be understood as that which is seen, while the immaterial is comprised of the abstract and invisible. Despite its seeming replication of the much-criticized body/soul dualism, this proposal does not actually concern itself with whether or not Homer views living beings as a unified body and soul. Instead, all that it takes from the body-versus-soul debate is the idea that “in Homer, the *psukhē* is essentially born of a split: it

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flies away at the moment of death, leaving a corpse behind.” Regardless of whether the concepts of body and soul apply to living people in the *Iliad*, the fact remains that the poem does

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 25-27. See also Proclus’ “Summary of the *Aithiopsis*,” lines 3-5.

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 27-28.

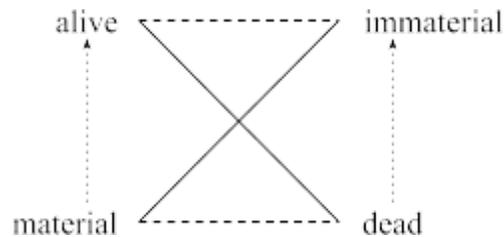
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Brooke Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3-5. For further reading on this debate, see also Snell (1953), Russo (2012), and Purves (2015).

Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject*, 20.

not distinguish between the two until a person has died. The separation of material and immaterial is therefore deeply linked with death and its aftermath in the *Iliad*.

The precise nature of this linkage can most easily be expressed via a semiotic square. Developed by A. J. Greimas, the semiotic square is a diagram used to represent the way in which relationships between opposing terms create meaning. In the square, terms positioned diagonally across from each other (shown here with solid lines) are contradictory; that is, they are opposed and mutually exclusive. Terms on the same horizontal axis (shown with dashed lines) are contrary, meaning they are opposed but not incapable of overlapping. These oppositions result in the bottom set of horizontal terms implying or equating to the terms located vertically above them (dotted-line arrows).



In this semiotic square, *alive* is contradictory to *dead*, because a person cannot literally be alive and dead at the same time. (Being metaphorically so is another matter; see Seth Schein's *The Mortal Hero*, as well as Part II of this essay.) Similarly, a single thing cannot simultaneously be immaterial and material. The fact that the immaterial *psukhē* does not appear until the moment of death—either because it was lurking unseen inside the material body in life or because it was not generated until that material body had fallen—demonstrates that the material is superordinate to the immaterial when defining living people in the *Iliad*. Hence my earlier position that the

body/soul duality in living people is ultimately irrelevant to the material/immaterial duality: the distinction between material and immaterial, while always extant, only becomes pertinent upon

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death because living people are primarily material. This illustrates the relationships shown on the horizontal and vertical axes of the square. Being alive can coexist with being immaterial, as can being material with being dead, but the two pairs are somewhat incongruous; that which is dead is not going to stay material for long, while any immateriality that exists in life is subordinate to the visible, material aspects of living. Contrarily, the status of being material implies and functionally equates to the status of being alive, while being dead implies a movement

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away from the material and towards the immaterial.

This set of relationships manifests in numerous ways throughout the *Iliad*. Life in the *Iliad* is a highly physical thing: Achilles repeatedly uses the phrase “as long as my springing knees will lift me” as a euphemism for being alive (9.743-44, 22.457-58), while Hector’s soul leaves behind his “young and supple strength” (22.429) when he dies. In both cases, the state of being alive is explicitly associated with something physical, something material: Achilles’ knees, the act of walking, the physical strength critical for a heroic warrior to possess. Hector’s death in particular also reminds us that death means destroying that material life. Although Homer merely states that Hector is “leaving behind” his strength, it is clear that Hector’s strength is actually *gone* now that he is dead; no one can come along to pick it up and use it the way they can his

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Cf. Alex Purves, “Ajax and Other Objects: Homer’s Vibrant Materialism,” *Ramus* 4 (2015). Purves examines “the particular way that the material can pass into the immaterial in Homer” and vice versa, but this boundary-blurring does not bring living people into the realm of the immaterial any more than my own hypothesis regarding *kleos* later in Part I. Rather, Purves is interested in what it means to be human in the *Iliad* and how this notion interacts with objects, temporality, and emotions.

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The logic behind the vertical relationships in semiotic squares is not always immediately apparent, but it essentially follows the transitive property. In the *Iliad*, something that is material is probably not dead, and something that is alive is definitely not dead. Therefore, something that is material is probably alive and vice versa.

armor, and the narrative demonstrates that Hector's death is functionally the destruction of Troy's protection and strength as well, as will be discussed further in Part II of this essay. Hector's family also repeatedly and explicitly links his death with the physical destruction of his body. While pleading with Hector not to face Achilles, Priam and Hecuba graphically describe packs of dogs ripping apart corpses, which they say is what will happen to both Priam and Hector himself if Hector is killed (22.77-89, 107). After Hector's death, Andromache laments how his body will be destroyed not only by dogs as Hecuba previously predicted, but also by decay itself: "glistening worms will wriggle through your flesh, / once the dogs have had their fill of your naked corpse" (22.598-99). Destruction at the end of life is not only limited to the bodies of the dead, however. Mourning rituals involve extensive destruction of the physical world: Andromache promises to burn stores of Trojan clothing in honor of Hector (22.600-5), while Achilles and the other Greeks cut their hair and burn it with Patroclus' body to demonstrate their grief (23.155-75). Achilles also sacrifices numerous animals and twelve captive Trojan youths as part of Patroclus' funeral, killing them and burning their corpses on his pyre (23.190-210). As will be demonstrated throughout this paper, such physical destruction signifies the division between life and death. A body being burned communicates that the individual in question is truly and fully dead.

In addition to destroying the material world, death constitutes an abandonment of whatever elements of life are not destroyed. Andromache is particularly cognizant of this fact; having already lost her parents and all of her brothers to Achilles' war efforts, she knows that losing Hector means losing the last family she has left (6.489-512). To Andromache, Hector's death is him leaving her behind, and she stresses this sense of abandonment in multiple speeches

throughout the *Iliad*. While pleading with him not to fight, she rhetorically asks him, “What other warmth, what comfort’s left for me, / once you have met your doom? Nothing but torment!” (6.489-90) and reminds him that his death would mean orphaning their son and making her a widow (6.512). This image of widowed Andromache and orphaned Astyanax is given a refrain in Andromache’s first lament for Hector, delivered immediately after she learns of his death: “Now you go down to the House of Death, the dark depths of the earth, / and leave me here to waste away in grief, a widow / lost in the royal halls—and the boy only a baby...” (22.566-69). She goes on to describe how Astyanax will lose the rich care and easy life he was afforded while Hector was alive, as the death of his father leaves him vulnerable and unprotected (22.569-94). Her lament at Hector’s funeral, though shorter, again echoes this same idea that, by dying, Hector has abandoned her and Astyanax to be victimized (24.852-78). Hecuba, Hector’s mother, also stresses her sense of abandonment in her lament upon Hector’s death, asking “How can I go on living? / What agonies must I suffer now, now *you* are dead and gone?” (22.507-8). Both women are not merely mourning the Hector that they knew; they are mourning the “hypothetical future” that they could have had if Hector had lived, reminding their audience both in and out of fiction that their lives will be radically harder without his protection.

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While the material world (i.e., life) is destroyed or abandoned by the act of death in the *Iliad*, the dead themselves are immaterial and imperceptible. Scholars generally agree that the word *psukhē*, typically translated as “soul,” more accurately means something like “wind-breath”; the description of a *psukhē* flying to the Underworld upon death would not, for Homer’s contemporary audience, invoke the eschatological transition of the Judeo-Christian

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soul, but rather the rush of air exiting the lungs as the body falls. The dead are that wind-breath:

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they have “no significant physical or mental existence” in the Underworld. The link between death and the immaterial/invisible in Greek thought is perhaps most neatly demonstrated by the fact that Hades’ name etymologically means “unseen” or “the invisible one,” while in the *Iliad*

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specifically it is the “wolf’s cap of Hades” that grants Athena invisibility. Dying is also compared to being hidden (23.280), leaving the light of the sun, and going into darkness, again

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imparting an unseen and unseeing nature upon death. The dead’s lack of physicality is stressed in the passage where Patroclus’ ghost appears to Achilles. The two are unable to make physical contact, with Patroclus disappearing “like a wisp of smoke” back to the Underworld as soon as Achilles tries to embrace him (23.117-19).

This same passage reveals one of the key underpinnings of why life and death are so intertwined with the material/immaterial dichotomy in the *Iliad*. If being alive means being material, and being material means being able to be perceived by and interact with other elements of the material world, then ultimately, being alive is defined by the capacity for social and physical interaction. Patroclus’ spirit mournfully tells Achilles, “Never again will you and I, alive and breathing, / huddle side-by-side, apart from loyal comrades, / making plans together—never...” (23.92-94). With this, Patroclus’ life is equated to his relationship with Achilles, while Achilles’ inability to embrace Patroclus reifies the fact of Patroclus’ death.

Patroclus, dead, can no more embrace Achilles or make plans with him than the deceased Hector can comfort and protect the abandoned Hecuba, Andromache, and Astyanax; the only reason

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 68; Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject*, 4.

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 68.

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The Oxford Classical Dictionary 3rd edition, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. “Hades.”

Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 90.

Patroclus can speak to Achilles at all because his body has not yet been burned, trapping him between life and death (23.80-91). The inability of the dead to interact with the living signifies that reason the material is equated to life is not so much because the fact of having a physical existence matters in and of itself, but because that physical existence denotes an ability to connect with other people, to have an influence on the world, to experience the pleasures of food, sex, youthful strength—to, in short, *live*.

In sum, when people die in the *Iliad*, they become reduced to only the immaterial, no longer able to interact with the living in any significant capacity because the physical aspects of their existence have been destroyed or abandoned. Where, then, does *kleos* fit into this picture? Put simply, *kleos* is something that is able to touch all four corners of the semiotic square at the same time: it is an immaterial thing achieved through death and the destruction of the material, yet it can only be bestowed by the living, i.e., the abandoned material. Achilles even confirms the inability of the dead to bestow *kleos* while mourning Patroclus; after all, *kleos* requires remembering a person and their great deeds, and Achilles says that the dead forget one another within the House of Death (22.458). While the person who receives *kleos* does not have to be

dead, Iliadic *kleos* is nevertheless *associated* with death. It is achieved by warriors who fall gloriously in battle, and it is also achieved by their killers. Even indirectly causing these deaths awards some degree of *kleos*: the quote from which this essay's title is derived sees Helen including herself and Paris, the causes of the war, among those who will live on in song for future generations (6.421-26). More broadly, it has been demonstrated by multiple scholars that

¹⁹ No pun intended.

²⁰ De Jong, "The Homeric Narrator," 194.

²¹ Cf. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, 98: "Suffering produces song... [a]nd glory is attached particularly to the tomb of the dead."

Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, 96.

Helen has a unique understanding of the power of song and poetry to bestow *kleos* after death and of her position as a legendary, *kleos*-having and -generating figure within history due to her

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role in the war. There is also evidence that the *Iliad* itself, a poem overwhelmingly focused on

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death, serves as the Homeric narrator advancing his own *kleos*. Moreover, even if a person is still alive when they receive *kleos*, the function of *kleos* is to outlast an individual's lifespan; the phrase *kleos aphthiton*, "imperishable *kleos*," is seen frequently in Greek poetry, including the

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Iliad. No one, save the gods, is immune to death, and so the *kleos* bestowed on killers will ultimately be the same as the *kleos* bestowed on their victims—the glory by which the living remember the dead. Once again, we see the semiotic relationship expressed above: the living, material world creates *kleos*, an immaterial thing implicitly linked with death. This relationship allows *kleos* to function as a form of immortality, something to carry on a person's memory among the living.

At this point, it may seem that the relationship between the material and immaterial only goes one way, with the immaterial world simply existing passively as something created by the material world. However, the two are in fact interdependent. The material world may generate the immaterial world, but the immaterial world in turn dictates or influences many of the events of the material world. Achilles in particular explicitly loses his concern for material motivations, shooting down Agamemnon's attempt to reconcile via offers of treasure and the return of Briseis (9.462-88). More broadly, he also dismisses Telamonian Ajax's arguments that death can be made up for with material rewards (9.772-80). Instead, Achilles' reasons for participating in the

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Maria C. Pantelia, "Helen and the Last Song for Hector," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 132, no. ½ (2002): 23, 25-26; Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, 96-98.

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De Jong, "The Homeric Narrator," 195-196, 201-205. See also Martin (1989).

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Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, 27.

war are overtly immaterial. Part of this is because Patroclus' death causes Achilles to give up on his own life. He rejoins the fighting not out of concern for his living comrades, but because he has decided to embrace an early death in order to avenge Patroclus (18.113-50); although he accepts Agamemnon's gifts of treasure and women, including Briseis, Achilles is unconcerned with these material pleasures, his only thoughts being of Patroclus and of his own impending death (19.281-401). Achilles' early death is also inextricably tied with the *kleos* that it will grant him. Once he decides to die at Troy after all, he is not content with merely any death: when he thinks the river god Scamander is about to drown him, he resents the inglorious nature of such a death, wishing instead that he could be killed in battle with Hector (21.310-20). By pursuing an early death in battle specifically, Achilles makes it clear that he is not simply attempting an elaborate suicide that would welcome death by any means. The *kleos* of being struck down in battle informs his pursuit of death as much as his grief for Patroclus. Choosing *kleos* over longevity is not only Achilles choosing his *own* death, however. Achilles' *kleos* is achieved through his *aristeia* in which he slaughters hordes of Trojan soldiers, consciously abandoning his previous lenient treatment of prisoners in favor of killing every Trojan he possibly can (21.111-19). In other words, Achilles' desire for immaterial *kleos* causes mass fatalities, i.e., mass destruction of the material world. As we will see in the following sections, these violent deaths are critical to understanding why Homer's schema of heroism and mortality demands a more delicate role for *kleos* than simple idealization.

Part II. Cyclical Violence

In his 1984 book *The Mortal Hero*, Seth Schein argues that, despite only covering one brief episode towards the war's end, the reason the *Iliad* works as the complete and definitive

story of the Trojan War is because it manipulates poetic and mythic tradition in order to make its

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events serve as reflections of the wider arc of the war. Most significantly, Patroclus' death in many ways is a proxy for Achilles' death, while Hector's death is functionally the fall of Troy

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itself—even though neither Achilles' death nor the destruction of Troy are actually depicted in the poem.

Achilles' fate is sealed from the moment he learns of Patroclus' death; from Book 18 un-

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til midway through Book 24, Achilles is symbolically dead. Schein notes that the language used to describe his reaction to Patroclus' death echoes the imagery used elsewhere in the *Iliad* to refer to dead warriors, while Thetis begins a *gōoio*, or lament for the dead, to express the grief

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that her role as Achilles' mother brings her. Achilles' humanity—his mercy towards those he defeats in battle, his love for others, even his desire to eat—entirely disappears beneath his grief

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and rage, alienating him from the other living people in the poem. He is made further inhuman by his characterization as either godlike or daemonic during the events leading up to his *aristeia*.

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Most significantly for the purposes of this essay, the gods maintain his strength by secretly filling him with nectar and ambrosia after he refuses to eat (19.411-19). (The reason for my emphasis on Achilles' fasting as a signifier for his inhuman, deathlike state will become clear in Part III.) As part of his symbolic death, Achilles becomes detached from the material world. His most notable physical actions during this period—killing the Trojans, performing sacrifices at Patroclus' funeral, desecrating Hector's body—are ones of destruction. Meanwhile, he refuses to

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 19-28.

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In addition to being another proxy for Achilles' death, as, like Patroclus, Hector dies while wearing Achilles' armor.

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 128-163.

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Ibid., 130-131.

30

Ibid., 129-140.

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Ibid., 137-138.

participate in any physical acts that could be deemed constructive, i.e., conducive to the continuation of life. The other Greeks around him eat food, build a shelter for Patroclus' urn, and compete in athletic games, but Achilles merely observes these activities as a judge or commander, never as an active participant (19.246-381, 23.271-995). There is also a more literal aspect to how Patroclus' death presages that of Achilles. In performing her lament, Thetis tells the other Nereids that Achilles will never return home from the war now, and Achilles confirms as much shortly after, telling Thetis that he has lost the will to live (18.67-68, 102-6). Both Thetis and Achilles consciously and explicitly recognize that Patroclus' death will lead to Achilles' death as well.

The connection between Hector's death and the fall of Troy is more subtle, but only barely. Hector is described as "the lone defense of Troy" (6.478), and after his death, the people of Troy react as though the war has already been lost: "wailing seized the city— / for all the world as if all Troy were torched and smoldering / down from the looming brows of the citadel

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to her roots" (22.482-4). Upon seeing Hector's corpse, Andromache faints and throws off the veil she received at her wedding (22.550-51). This is a deeply symbolic action which not only shows the end of Hector and Andromache's marriage, but also anticipates the sexual violation and architectural destruction involved in the sack of Troy by calling upon the double meaning of

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krēdemnon, "veil," as referring to both chastity and a city tower. The sight of Hector's corpse is again used to call upon the destruction of Troy in Book 24, this time when Cassandra is the first to see Priam returning with the body, alluding to her role in the wider mythology as the first

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Trojan to predict the city's fall. Even the final line of the poem reiterates the ways in which

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 168.

33

Ibid., 176.

Ibid., 189.

Hector equates to Troy as a whole; as Schein puts it, “When the Trojans, whose most common ep-

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ithet is ‘[breaker] of horses,’ bury ‘Hektor, [breaker] of horses’... they celebrate the funeral not only of the preeminent representative of their culture and civilization but of the city itself,

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whose destruction is inextricably bound up with that of Hektor.”

If we accept Schein’s theory, then it is easy to read the *Iliad* as a commentary on the cyclical nature of the violence it depicts, with the violence against Patroclus and Hector signifying and indeed precipitating further violence against Achilles and Troy. For the sake of clarity, it should be noted here that “cyclical” does not connote any sort of circular or self-contained quality to Iliadic violence. Rather, it is cyclical in the self-perpetuating sense: violence inevitably begets more violence, which is not necessarily limited to just those who dealt the first blow.

The characters of the *Iliad* are conscious of this cyclical violence. In addition to reminding the audience of Achilles’ approaching death, Achilles and Thetis’ reactions to Patroclus’ death highlight the fact that Achilles’ own death is ultimately caused not just by his desire for *kleos*, but by the violence visited upon him by the war; had Patroclus not died, Achilles potentially could have chosen a long, anonymous life instead of a short and famous one. Because Patroclus is dead, however, Achilles says that the only thing he has left to live for is killing Hector—an action which is prophesied to lead to Achilles’ own death shortly thereafter (18.105-13). Achilles’ choice to murder Hector knowing he will also die as a result is not, Homer reminds us, a random self-destructive outburst, but rather retribution for Hector’s own violence.

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Schein translates the epithet as “tamer of horses”; I, on advice from Brett Rogers, have replaced it with the more forceful “breaker of horses” used by Fagles and Lattimore, which highlights its linguistic connection to the concepts of destruction and killing.

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 191.

In other words, Iliadic violence does not come out of nowhere. Andromache quite aptly summarizes the cycle of violence in her lament for Hector in Book 24: “And you, my child... / some Achaean marauder will seize you by the arm / and hurl you headlong down from the ramparts—horrible death— / enraged at you because Hector once cut down his brother, / his

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father or his son...” (24.862-68). While she is speaking (correctly) of Astyanax’s fate, her words are also applicable to the fates of this paper’s central heroes. Hector’s murder of Patroclus enrages Achilles, who kills Hector, only to in turn be killed by Hector’s brother Paris in the

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broader poetic tradition.

The violence of the Iliadic heroes does not merely presage further violence, however—it escalates it. Each subsequent or retaliatory act of violence is more dramatic, more destructive than the last. The death of Patroclus, a moderately significant hero in the *Iliad*, leads to the death of Achilles, the “best of the Achaeans” (1.287, 490; 16.322). The death of Hector, the greatest of the Trojans, leads to the “death” (i.e., destruction) of his entire civilization. This escalation also results in indiscriminate targeting by retaliatory violence; the escalation is not just in the sense of relative greatness of each subsequent victim, but in the number of people drawn into the cycle over time. Looking again to Andromache’s funerary lament, we see her cognizance of this fact. Hector killed more Greeks than just Patroclus, so there are more Greeks than just Achilles who would have liked to get revenge on Hector. Hector’s death does not mean those Greeks will

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This is not the only motivation suggested for Astyanax’s murder in the wider Greek tradition. In Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, the Greeks kill Astyanax to preempt the possibility of him growing up to avenge his father (Schein 190). Homer/Andromache attributing his murder to anger and vengeance emphasizes the brutality of the act, not couching it behind any sort of strategic thinking.

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Anthony T. Edwards, “Achilles in the Underworld: *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aethiopsis*,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 26, no. 3 (1985): 215. See also Proclus’ “Summary of the *Aithiopsis*,” lines 7-9.

accept their lack of revenge—it means they will turn their violence upon Hector’s family to punish him by proxy.

This escalation is also seen in the fact that Achilles is not the only person to die as a consequence of Patroclus’ death, even if his death is the most prominently discussed result within the narrative. As he is dying, Patroclus warns Hector that killing him has sealed Hector’s own fate as well: “You too, you won’t live long yourself, I swear. / Already I see them looming up beside you—death / and the strong force of fate, to bring you down...” (16.997-99).

Moreover, Achilles’ revenge for Patroclus is not exclusively targeted at Hector. During his *aristeia*, Achilles vows to butcher every Trojan he can get his hands on (21.152-54), and he does so. There is more death than the narrator can even list—after the initial deaths of several named men, the slaughter becomes less akin to a battle than to the rushing motions of shoals of fish pursued by a predator (21.25). Individuality returns with the death of Priam’s son Lycaon, who begs Achilles for mercy in part because, demonstrating some understanding of the same escalating and misdirected retribution discussed by Andromache, he is only Hector’s half-brother: “I’m not from the same womb as Hector, / Hector who killed your friend, your strong, *gentle* friend!” (21.108-9). Lycaon attempts to remind Achilles that it is Hector alone who slew Patroclus, and therefore Hector alone who deserves Achilles’ wrath, but such an argument flies in the face of the entire nature of war. Homer reminds us of this much earlier in the poem, when the soldiers attempt to put an end to the war by reducing the violence down to just the two men who started the conflict: a *mano a mano* between Menelaus and Paris. Given that this duel occurs in Book 3 of the 24-book poem, it obviously doesn’t work: Menelaus is declared the winner, but the gods refuse to let the war end there and provoke the two sides to

attack each other once more (3.534-4.146). Allowing the heroes to come so close to containing and ending the cycle of violence—only for the gods themselves to yank that resolution away—suggests that it is impossible for violence to contain itself to a single conflict. Paris’ slight against Menelaus spirals into an all-out war involving dozens of cities. Patroclus’ death results in the deaths of Achilles, Hector, and everyone standing between them. The general Greek desire to take revenge on Hector and the Trojans is so great that even Astyanax, a blameless infant, will be killed to satiate it.

None of this is to say that the heroes of the *Iliad* are content to perpetuate the cycle of violence and ignore the suffering it inflicts on themselves and their loved ones. In fact, multiple characters openly question this violence and try to escape it. In a piercing lament for Hector, Andromache demands, “What help are you to [Astyanax], now you are dead?— / what help is he to you?” (22.571-72). Perhaps more than any other character in the *Iliad*, Andromache is wholly uninterested in the warrior culture that dominates the story. She repeatedly and vocally expresses that her primary concern is for her family, that she doesn’t care about Hector fulfilling his heroic role when doing so could kill him, that the most important result of Hector’s death in her mind is

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not his heroism or *kleos*, but the fact that it leaves her and Astyanax alone in the world. Schein describes this attitude as Andromache “[emphasizing] the fatal nature of Hektor’s heroism for his own family as well as for his enemies” and “[expressing] her unsentimental, realistic under-

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standing that Hektor’s (and her own) death is a concomitant of his way of life.” Additionally, while Hector does choose to participate in the cycle of violence by fighting on the battlefield, Homer does not portray this as an easy decision. Hector’s dilemma between his love

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Cf. Celsiana Warwick, “The Maternal Warrior: Gender and *Kleos* in the *Iliad*,” *American Journal of Philology* 140, no. 1 (2019): 5.

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 190.

for his family and his duty to his city is well-documented, with his tenderness and his consistent ranking of Andromache as the most-loved part of his life demonstrating that he, too, fears the

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repercussions his heroic death will have for his loved ones.

Even Achilles expresses a frustration with and desire to escape from the warrior culture in which he excels. His rejection of the material gifts offered by the envoy from Agamemnon in Book 9 is also an implicit rejection of the idea that such rewards are worth fighting and dying

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for. Like Andromache, Achilles is openly questioning the values of his society, no longer seeing death as a fair price for glory and instead recognizing it as a state of permanent, inescapa-

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ble loss. Achilles' rebellion against a culture that wants him to give up his only life in the name of questionable values persists until Patroclus is killed, at which point death once again becomes an appealing option—not because its horror has been mitigated, but rather because the

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loss it represents is no less painful than what he has suffered in life. In his decision to die, Achilles also re-embraces the values of warrior culture that dictate how heroes are rewarded for their battle participation. Though still unmoved by material reward—as mentioned in Part I, he finally accepts Agamemnon's gifts, but expresses no interest in them, not even bothering to sleep with Briseis (24.156-61)—he considers *kleos* a significant and worthwhile benefit of his pursuit of an early death. Achilles has no reason to care about the material world anymore because, as previously established, he is already dead metaphorically, and so the only thing left for him is the immaterial reward of *kleos*. Additionally, Achilles' choice of *kleos* over longevity is ultimately

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 174, 176-179.

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Ibid., 106.

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The parallels between Achilles and Andromache are far more extensive and significant than what is discussed here; for more in-depth and gender-focused analysis, see Warwick (2019) and McElduff (n.d.).

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 104-110.

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Cf. Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 144: “[Achilles’] knowledge that nothing worse can happen to him sets him apart from everyone else in the *Iliad*.”

made because he feels he no longer has much of a choice at all. He has failed to escape the warrior culture in which he is embedded, and Patroclus is dead as a result; a long, unheroic life full of grief lacks any benefits from Achilles' perspective. If he's going to have a heroic death, he might as well make the best of it and win *kleos* by taking as many people as possible down with him (18.137-48).

Even when Achilles is attempting to distance himself from heroic values, however, he never fully succeeds in doing so. When the envoy reaches him in the Myrmidon camp, he is "singing the famous deeds of fighting heroes" in order to lift his spirits (9.222-30). Although Achilles later rejects Odysseus' exhortation to "[t]hink of the glory you will gather in [the Achae-

⁴⁶ans'] eyes" (9.367), claiming that he has decided to sail home and give up his chance at glory (9.500-20), his participation in transmitting the *kleos* of others only moments before demonstrates that he has not entirely given up his attachment to heroic values. After all, for all Achilles' protestations against the idea that any reward is worth losing his life, he is unable to conceptualize another way of being. Even his frustrations with his society are verbalized through

⁴⁷a misuse of heroic vocabulary: when he notes that "[t]he same honor waits for the coward and ⁴⁸the brave... both go down to Death" (9.386-87), he uses the word *timē* for "honor." *Timē* is typically associated with the physical prizes, such as women and treasure, that serve as marks of

⁴⁹honor won through battle prowess and bravery. Achilles' claim that brave fighters and cowards

⁴⁶ It is perhaps noteworthy that Odysseus' appeal to glory deviates from Agamemnon's stated offer (9.144-93), which Odysseus recites perfectly up until 9.363. However, I am hesitant to ascribe too much meaning to this detail given that the corresponding lines in Agamemnon's original speech contain a series of insults against Achilles (9.189-93). Moreover, as the first member of the envoy to speak, Odysseus has not yet discovered that Achilles is questioning the worth of *timē* and *kleos*.

⁴⁷ Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 105-110. The idea of Achilles' misuse of heroic language is in actuality far more controversial than I have made it appear, though the debate is primarily concerned with linguistic formulae rather than this isolated use of *timē*. See Martin (1989), 146-159.

⁴⁸ Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 105.

Ibid., 71.

receive the same *timē* is thus not an accurate or appropriate use of the term's normal heroic meaning, but instead conflates *timē* and death in order to point out that the rewards promised to fighters are in fact worthless upon death and its accompanying disassociation from the physical world. Yet in his bitterly ironic use of *timē*, Achilles also demonstrates that he values heroism enough that he is bothered by his own revelation that death makes heroic honor meaningless. The assertion that all men receive the same *timē* (i.e., reward) of death would be illegible if Achilles could picture any system of reward other than heroic *timē*; the line only has meaning because he doesn't imagine that such a system could exist. Achilles' perspective on warrior heroism ultimately remains an emic one: he can distance himself enough to realize that *timē* might be worthless, but he never goes so far as to wonder if it might not be *important*. Even as he questions why *timē* matters, the idea of a life where it actually *doesn't* remains beyond his conceptual and linguistic grasp. This failure to disengage from the value system of warrior heroism even as he criticizes it reveals that Achilles is trapped not just physically and socially within his role as a warrior, but mentally as well.

Part III. Life Goes On

Is the pattern of cyclical violence hopeless? Is Homer suggesting that the heroes of the *Iliad* are doomed to simply fight and die, wreaking ever more destruction in the name of a flawed yet inescapable warrior culture? Perhaps not. To uncover this more hopeful reading, we must look beyond the violence itself and instead examine what happens to the living after the deaths of Patroclus and Hector. In doing so, the theme of this section and of the final two books of the

Cf. Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 105-106: Achilles "[misuses] the word 'honor' (*timē*) in a way that implies a non-acceptance of the normal value system and suggests a groping toward some other that does not exist anywhere in the world of the poem and is no real alternative."

Iliad—the idea that life must continue after a loss—will reveal a social purpose for *kleos* as a balm for the inevitability of death.

For all their action and violence, Books 18 through 23 of the *Iliad* can be seen as a type

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of stasis. Achilles, symbolically dead, is physically and emotionally unchanging. Before and during his *aristeia*, he has no appetite and speaks of nothing but death (19.249-55, 361-401). He claims that vengeance will sate him, yet Book 23 shows him in exactly the same state, if not worse—he refuses to even wash the blood off of himself until Patroclus’ body has been burned (23.50-61). Eating and bathing are both responses to the passage of time. People eat because they have become hungry, because time has passed since their last meal; people bathe because they have become dirty, because time has passed since they last cleaned themselves. Achilles insisting that he will not eat until he has achieved vengeance, that he won’t eat or bathe until after Patroclus’ funeral, shows his resistance to acknowledging that the world will continue to turn without Patroclus in it: he is attempting to, in whatever ways are available to him, remain as close as possible to the moment when he learned of Patroclus’ death, because that moment is as close as he can get to the time when Patroclus was alive. He is, in short, preserving himself in the state of intense, raw *akhos* (grief) from which his name derives, living up to his role described by Greg-

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ory Nagy as a character “pervasively associated with the theme of grief.”

However, because this intense grief is taking the form of a refusal to move forward, the ordinary transition from life to death has been suspended for everyone around Achilles as well. Achilles refuses to bury Patroclus until Patroclus’ ghost begs him to do so, explaining that he is unable to cross into the Underworld while his body remains unburied (18.389-99, 23.81-89).

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To be clear, I am using “stasis” here to refer to an unchanging state, not Greek civil war.

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Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 69-77.

This detail demonstrates that funerals mark the point at which the dead are truly and fully dead: burning and burying a body ensures that the *psukhē* has crossed through the Gates of Death and is no longer able to visit the land of the living (23.90-91). Achilles' acquiescence and Patroclus' subsequent funeral, wherein Achilles' mood is slightly lifted while watching the funeral games, are thus a limited acknowledgment by Achilles that he cannot stay suspended in this inert grief forever. However, the beginning of Book 24 reveals how Achilles has not truly accepted the need to let the world move forward after his personal loss. For twelve days, Achilles continues to grieve day and night, holding Hector's corpse hostage and dragging it behind his chariot just as he did immediately after Hector's death (22.466-76, 24.4-21). This action shows us that Achilles' grief is not subsiding or evolving: he is repeating his actions from before Patroclus' funeral, still seemingly convinced that he can return to normal if he just manages to satisfy himself with revenge. Essentially, Achilles' efforts to remain in the moment of Patroclus' death have trapped him in the depths of grief, and now no one and nothing on the Greek side—not the ghost of Patroclus, not the ritual mourning of a funeral—can seem to get him unstuck. The problem is not that Patroclus is dead. The problem is that Achilles *isn't*, and he doesn't know how to continue in a world where being alive means being separated from Patroclus.

Enter Priam. Achilles and Patroclus are not the only people held in stasis by Achilles' refusal to move on: Hector has also been unable to fully transition into death. Like Patroclus, he has been lying unburned and unburied in the Greek camp. Thanks to Apollo's intervention, Hector's body has not even decayed, further demonstrating how the passage from life into death has been disrupted by Achilles' actions (24.21-25). All this time, Hector's family has been unable to hold a funeral for him and thus has not been able to properly mourn and move on; in

other words, they have been forced into the same position as Achilles himself. Consequently, there is no one in the *Iliad* better suited to help Achilles deal with his grief than Priam, a man going through a parallel loss. Priam even admits to Achilles that he has neither slept nor eaten since Hector died, just as Achilles has refused to eat or sleep since Patroclus' death (24.749-752). The two men are linked by their static and overwhelming grief and mutual alienation from the living, and so when they see one another in Achilles' tent, they are able to recognize that, improbably, the two of them have more in common with one another than with anyone else in the story at this

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point. The conversation between Priam and Achilles is a scene of shared humanity, both acknowledging what Schein calls "the social need on the part of the living to bury the dead with formal, ritual propriety in order to humanize the fact of death and make it

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more tolerable." In this respect, it makes perfect sense that Achilles has remained trapped in his grief even after Patroclus' funeral. To allow Achilles to move forward even as he denies Priam the same opportunity would be to deny the Trojans their very humanity. Neither Priam nor Achilles can make any progress in their grief until *both* of them can do so—until both Patroclus and Hector are buried and the movement from life to death can follow its normal course once more. Achilles himself even acknowledges this, telling Priam, "Enough of endless tears, / the pain that breaks the spirit. / Grief for your son will do no good at all. / You will never bring him back to life— / sooner you must suffer something worse." (24.641-45). This is true enough for Priam, but it also serves as an echo of Thetis' advice to Achilles at 24.155-61 to stop letting himself be overcome by grief and make the best of his short time left in life. Achilles giving

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Cf. Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 159: "Priam, too, is virtually dead." Priam's similarities to Achilles' father Peleus are also a significant factor in their ability to bond and make peace during this scene; see Schein (1984), 159-163.

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 188.

Priam similar advice subtextually confirms to the audience that he has finally accepted that he cannot remain mired in his grief forever.

The true turning point of all of this—Achilles' wrath, his symbolic death, his and Priam's shared grief—comes towards the end of their conversation, when Achilles and Priam share a meal (24.707-55). As discussed above, refusal of food is a recurring marker of Achilles as dead and inhuman: it denies the passage of time since Patroclus' death, and it is one of the ways in which Achilles alienates himself from the material world as part of his metaphorical death. Once Priam breaks through and reacquaints Achilles with his humanity, Achilles' desire for food is restored. By accepting food, Achilles re-engages with the material world in a non-destructive manner, symbolically bringing him back into the realm of the living. He is still doomed to die, but his deadly rage—deadly both for others and for his own humanity—is ended. The fact that Priam, who is also metaphorically near death, shares the meal with him further reaffirms the humanity of both men. In restoring metaphorical life and humanity to Achilles and Priam, the act of eating signifies to the audience that the stasis of grief and death that permeated Books 18 through 23 has been broken. Achilles compares himself and Priam to Niobe, whose children were slaughtered and lay unburied for nine days before the gods finally interred them, at which point "Niobe, gaunt, worn to the bone with weeping, / turned her thoughts to food" (24.717-22). This is not to say that Achilles and Priam are done grieving, of course. Like Niobe, Priam and Achilles will still grieve after they eat (24.726-30), but they have reached a point where they can no longer continue being consumed by their grief.

In other words, life must go on. Grief must subside. But how does this happen, and what comes after it? Perhaps counterintuitively, I will begin by addressing the second part of this

question, as I feel that doing so naturally reveals the answer to the first part. In his book *The Best of the Achaeans*, Gregory Nagy demonstrates how *akhos* and *penthos*, both words for grief (though *penthos* is particularly used to refer to public mourning), are linguistically and conceptually

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linked with yet contrasted against *kleos* in Greek poetry. Much like how *kleos* is accompanied by the epithet *aphthiton*, “unfailing” or “imperishable,” *akhos* and *penthos* in Ho-

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meric epic are used in conjunction with *alaston*, “unforgettable.” In other words, both *kleos* and grief are acts of eternally memorializing a person beyond their individual lifespan. However, *kleos* and grief cannot actually coexist. Telling the story of a person’s life and great accomplishments to an audience that knew the person does not generate a sense of *kleos*, but rather serves as

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a reminder of loss and thereby imparts grief upon the audience. Instead, the target audience for *kleos* seems to be the “generations still unborn” referenced by Helen and Hector

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in the *Iliad* and Alkinoos in the *Odyssey*. *Kleos* is therefore something that happens *after* mourning; mourning eventually becomes *kleos*, but is not *kleos* in itself. Thus, the answer to the first part of the question is implicitly revealed: just as Achilles eventually had to accept the normal passage of life into death, the only way for grief to pass into *kleos* is with time.

The movement from grief to *kleos* is reflected in the structure of the laments at Hector’s funeral. Much ink has been spilled over the unusual order in which Andromache, Hecuba, and

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Helen present their laments. Homeric poems employ what J. Kakridis terms an “ascending scale of affection” wherein the person with the closest relationship to a scene’s focal character is

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Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 94-117.

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Ibid., 95.

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Ibid., 98-101.

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Ibid., 100-101.

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See Pantelia (2002) and McElduff (n.d.).

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the last one named in the scene, serving as a sort of emotional climax to the action. Yet the funeral for Hector in Book 24 *begins* with the lament of Andromache—who, as Hector’s wife, was ranked as the closest to him in her appearances in Books 6 and 22—and ends with the lament performed by Helen. Maria Pantelia argues that this inverted ranking is due to Helen’s

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status as a character who understands the power of song to bestow *kleos*. Andromache’s lament, fitting for her character, is unconcerned with Hector’s *kleos*; her song is one of her own grief and suffering upon Hector’s loss, with Hector’s deeds in life being framed as the cause of Astyanax’s impending doom rather than accomplishments to be celebrated (24.850-77).

Hecuba’s lament, though less immediately personal and bereft than Andromache’s, also fails to bestow *kleos* because it only describes the tragic circumstances of Hector’s death rather than his greatness in life (24.878-92). It is only Helen—Helen who is introduced weaving the story of the Trojan War in a textile version of Homer’s own work, Helen who recites the names and qualities of the Greek heroes to Priam, Helen who is aware of her and their places as figures in epic poetry—who speaks of the person that Hector was in life (24.893-912). Giving such a lament to a character so strongly associated with *kleos* and placing it after the more grief-driven, less productive laments of the women closest to Hector serves as a microcosm of the transition from mourning to *kleos* that occurs after a person has died.

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At this point in the essay, I have established the following: 1. *kleos* is a form of immortality, an immaterial thing transmitted among the living after someone has died; 2. the violence of the *Iliad* is not uniformly praised by the characters or narrative, but is instead

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J. Kakridis, *Homeric Researches* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1949) quoted in Pantelia, “Helen and the Last Song for Hector,” 22-23.

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Pantelia, “Helen and the Last Song for Hector,” 23.

Ibid., 25-26.

something highly destructive, cyclical, and painful despite offering the possibility of *kleos* to those who participate in it; 3. refusing to move forward after a loss is not an option, because the world must be allowed to continue so that grief can eventually become *kleos*. All three of these facts are vital to answering the question that ultimately drives this paper: what is the *point* of *kleos*? Why does Homer care about transmitting the glory of people he has never met, especially when he seems so ambivalent about the violence through which they achieved that glory? Why should we as an audience listen? My proposed answer is outlined in detail below, but an astute reader may already guess its shape simply by looking again at the title of this paper. In the Homeric tradition, people are doomed to die, but *kleos* is immortal due to its status as something immaterial communicated by future generations. Thus, *kleos* acts in conversation with mortality, communicating to its audience both the fact of death and the possibility of transcendence. As Jasper Griffin puts it, “[t]he hero dies, not so much for his own glory, not even so much for his friends, as for the glory of song, which explains to a spellbound audience the greatness and fragility of the life of man.”

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Homer is deeply conscious of these fragile limitations of human life. The destruction of the material discussed in Part I is not limited to the heroes themselves. Even the evidence of human activity is eventually destroyed. The defensive wall and moat that protected the Greek forces’ camps, Homer says, were swept away by the gods as soon as the war ended (12.4-40). This detail does not just exist to explain a lack of physical evidence left by the Greek camp in the Trojan War—it serves as a symbolic reminder of the looming end of the Heroic Age and the

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impermanence of human existence. This same society-wide impermanence is applied to the Trojan side as well. By illustrating how Hector's death presages the death of Troy as a civilization, Homer also illustrates the logical conclusion to the cycle of violence: the destruction of the material heroes eventually escalates to the destruction of the material civilization they fought and died for. The only thing left to remember this age and these characters by, then, is through the

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songs sung about them, i.e., *kleos*.

It is therefore the immateriality of *kleos* that sets it apart as a mode of immortality for Homer. Immaterial song is the only thing that can survive even as the material world is destroyed on an ever-larger scale. The *Iliad*'s depiction of its heroes' lives as strictly finite and lacking any

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significant afterlife is somewhat unique within Greek epic; in contrast to alternate traditions that grant certain heroes immortality in the form of apotheosis, hero cults, or an eternal existence in a paradisiacal realm like the Elysian Plain, there is no destination available for the Iliadic *psu-*

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khē except the realm of Hades. Achilles is afforded such immortality in the *Aithiopsis* by way of Thetis snatching him from his funeral pyre and transporting him to the White Island, an

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equivalent to Elysium or the Isles of the Blessed. If we place this situation in the semiotic square developed in Part I, it is immediately apparent that there is little difference between Achilles' "immortality" and ordinary death in the Iliadic schema: it occurs upon the physical

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Lorenzo F. Garcia, Jr., *Homeric Durability: Telling Time in the Iliad* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013), 109. Garcia argues in the same chapter that the rampart's destruction also implies the destruction of Greek *kleos* itself; for reasons that are hopefully obvious, I do not agree with this aspect of his argument.

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Cf. Pantelia, "Helen and the Last Song for Hector," 23: "[T]he primary function of epic poetry... is to preserve the memory of the hero beyond the limitations of his society." See also De Jong, "The Homeric Narrator," 201: "[N]o trace of the Achaean wall remains, and its memory survives solely as a result of [the Homeric narrator's] song."

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Nagy notes in *The Best of the Achaeans* that immortality in the Greek poetic tradition is not a *lack* of death, but instead an eternal afterlife (174-177). I concur with his assessment that Iliadic immortality is distinguished by the fact that "the focus... is not on the hero's afterlife, but rather, on the eternal survival of the epic that glorifies him" (175).

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Edwards, "Achilles in the Underworld," 215-218; Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 47-49, 68-72.

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Edwards, "Achilles in the Underworld," 215. See also Proclus' "Summary of the *Aithiopsis*," lines 14-15.

destruction of his body and relegates him to a realm where ordinary mortals do not live and consequently cannot see or interact with him. He is still alienated from the material world, from social connections, and from humanity, just as he was during his metaphorical death in the *Iliad*.

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The only difference between a *psukhē* confined to the House of unseen Hades and Achilles confined to the White Island is that the Underworld is fairly dismal and the *psukhē* is a mere shade of a living person, while Achilles enjoys a slightly higher level of comfort and retains his

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personal identity. *Kleos* is therefore a more meaningful form of immortality because, as something that transmits knowledge of a person among the living even after their death, it provides continuity to a person's social existence; the *Iliad*'s belief that interaction with the living world is fundamental to being alive renders meaningless any immortality that does not allow that interaction. At the same time, *kleos* is more personal an existence than residing as a shade in the House of Death; though the dead cannot remember their names and deeds, the living can carry on memories of them as individuals via *kleos*.

This idea of the “personal” is deeply intertwined with all of the topics discussed in this paper—death, grief, *kleos*, materiality, violence. Bruce Lincoln, writing on concepts of death in Proto-Indo-European belief systems, notes a recurring idea of matter as transmutable: living

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things are born from the earth, and return to earth when they die. This, he argues, explains the appeal of *kleos*, because “[i]n a universe where impersonal matter endured forever but the personal self was extinguished at death, the most which could survive of that self was a rumor, a

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Cf. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 175: “[I]n the *Aithiopsis*, the immortality reached by Achilles is not an immediate but a remote state: after death, the hero is permanently removed from the here-and-now of the Achaeans who mourn him.”

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Edwards, “Achilles in the Underworld,” 215; Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 68.

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Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 14.

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reputation.” I believe this is an entirely correct but incomplete formulation. Personal immortality only explains why people would be motivated to gain *kleos*, not why they would have any interest in transmitting the *kleos* of others beyond the minimum amount necessary to uphold the system that could one day grant them *kleos* as well. That is to say, it strikes me as unlikely that the entire oral, poetic, and lyrical tradition of *kleos* could survive for centuries on selfish motivations alone, especially since Homer’s ambivalence towards his heroes’ violent glory does not seem to present *kleos* as something the audience of the *Iliad* should seek for themselves. I believe there is another side to the relationship between *kleos* and the personal in the *Iliad* which explains why *kleos* deserves an audience. For the person who achieves *kleos*, it serves an abstract continuation of their personal existence, as Lincoln says; however, the act of bestowing *kleos* also depersonalizes and mythologizes death for the still-living audience and storytellers. As demonstrated at the beginning of this section, Homeric *kleos* is something that can only be granted if the audience is not mourning the hero who achieved it, which is typically a status reserved for audiences born after the hero was already dead. In other words, *kleos* implies a lack of personal connection with the dead, and the act of telling a story with the intention of invoking *kleos* rather than grief is an implicit declaration on the part of the storyteller that the dead should

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no longer be regarded as personal loved ones, but as stories. By invoking the concept of death in an impersonal, temporally-removed capacity, *kleos* enables audiences and poets to obliquely engage with their own mortality and impermanence while sidestepping the grief that accompanies personal experiences with death.

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Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice*, 15.

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Cf. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 100-101: “What would otherwise be a *penthos* for Helen’s audience can thus remain a *kleos*, since there is no personal involvement... What is an *akhos* for Odysseus is for future audiences simply a ‘song’ like the *Iliad*, with its plot enacted by the Will of Zeus and his gods.”

This is precisely the function of *kleos* in the *Iliad*: as a vehicle through which mortality is made bearable. The *Iliad* communicates this capability via the characters' explicit knowledge of *kleos* as something that will be bestowed upon them by future generations as a reward for their greatness and suffering (6.424-26; 22.359-62). The characters' personal involvement in the death and destruction of the Trojan War causes them grief, while *kleos* is, from their perspective, something yet to come. This reminds the audience that we are *not* grieving—the deaths that bereaved the characters in their lifetime are now a story, impersonal and glorious. Homer is the storyteller invoking *kleos*; the *Iliad* is the poem through which glory is transmitted; we the audience are the future generations for whom the heroes live on in song. As easy as it is to get swept up in the tragedy and grief of the Iliadic heroes, the fact we are hearing about them in a poem of *kleos* reminds us that grief is transient, that death one day becomes just an end to a story rather than a deeply painful personal loss.

In addition to its role in transmuting death into an impersonal and thus emotionally manageable myth, the possibility of *kleos* suggests a diminishing of the seemingly inescapable cyclical violence and material destruction of the *Iliad*. The belief in *kleos* inherently communicates the assumption—or at least the hope—that there will be future generations to carry on the immortal song. If the cycle of violence hypothetically escalates until either a god steps in (as when Athena prevents the suitors' families from seeking revenge on Odysseus at the end of the *Odyssey*) or civilization itself is destroyed, it is absurd that characters caught in that cycle should place their faith in hypothetical future generations to carry on their memory in *kleos*. Yet, improbably, they do. Yet, improbably, here we are. Clearly, the cycle of violence is

not as hopeless as it initially appears: the very fact that we exist proves that violence can end or at least de-escalate.

None of this contradicts the ambivalent Homeric attitude towards *kleos* discussed in the introduction to this paper. *Kleos* makes violence and death less horrific on a personal level, but grief has the opposite effect, and Homer makes use of both to remind the audience that pursuing *kleos* perpetuates a destructive cycle. Helen and Hector's invocations of *kleos* quoted in the introduction are spoken at some of their lowest moments: Helen while overcome with guilt and anger at the role she and Paris have played in causing so much tragedy (6.406-26), Hector upon realizing that the gods have tricked him into dying at Achilles' hands (22.346-62). Similarly, Achilles' decision to receive an early death and imperishable *kleos* is made when Patroclus' death plunges him into the worst grief he can imagine and renders the idea of a long life hellish. *Kleos* is thus positioned as something of a last-ditch comfort for the people who actually receive it, a silver lining when deadly violence and suffering have become overwhelming and no other reward is possible. More broadly, despite Priam's proclamation that "for a young man / all looks fine and noble if he goes down in war" (22.83-84), the death of young men in battle is in fact agonizing for them and for the people around them. At the end of the *Iliad*, the narrator's primary concern is the massive amount of loss wrought by the warriors' violence, with the unspoken implication of *kleos* in Helen's funeral lament mainly functioning as a slender note of hope to remind the audience that grief eventually fades and vanishes. Iliadic *kleos* is thus not so

Cf. Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 67-68: "By the end, Hektor, the main figure on the Trojan side, has been killed and his city symbolically sacked; Achilles, the chief figure on the Greek side and the central character in the poem, has lost and buried his beloved comrade Patroklos and, by killing Hektor, has in effect brought about his own death, which has been repeatedly prophesied and prefigured. The funeral games of Patroklos in Book 23 and the mourning and burial of Hektor in Book 24 are, in a sense, not only for these two heroes but for everyone in the poem. They form a ritually appropriate, aesthetically and spiritually satisfying conclusion to the relentless killing and dying; they help us, as well as the Greeks and Trojans, to endure the pain and loss entailed in being mortal."

much a direct glorification of violence as it is a response to a world in which violence is interwoven with every facet of mortality; a peaceful life and death could merit *kleos*, but no one who dies in the *Iliad* dies gently, and in the heroic warrior culture of the characters in the poem, there is no way to gain enough status to be worthy of *kleos* except through an association with violence and death.

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In summation, the status of *kleos* as something primarily transmitted by future generations stresses the cost of achieving *kleos* under the conditions present in the *Iliad* while also signifying how the broader arc of the world can and must move forward in the wake of personal loss. The mortal suffering of the heroes of the Trojan War is presented as a source of grief for them but a myth of *kleos* for the audience, suggesting that our own grief and mortality will eventually undergo the same transmutation into stories. People will inevitably die, grief will inevitably end, even civilizations and the material evidence of human lives will inevitably crumble, but *kleos* persists as long as there are people to tell of it. Although *kleos aphthiton* is defined literally as imperishable glory, fame, and song, its conceptual role in the *Iliad* also conveys the imperishability of human connection and existence in spite of our own mortality.

Life, in other words, goes on.

Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this paper, the *Iliad* raises fundamental questions about human nature that can seem too tremendous to answer. How do we deal with grief? How do we end cycles of violence? How do we reconcile our knowledge of our own impermanence? The Homeric response to all of these questions is essentially, “I don’t know, but *kleos* proves that it’s

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 68, 105-110.

possible.” For all its supposed status as “from beginning to end a poem of death,” the *Iliad* is not as concerned with the dismal reality that we all die as it is with the fact of what human beings do

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with that knowledge. As Schein says in *The Mortal Hero*,

by making his poem end with the funeral of Hektor, Homer places the final emphasis on death not as the necessary end for each individual (and so the reason for his heroism), but as an occasion for the affirmation of the continuity of human, social existence in the face of inevitable suffering and loss. In the end, love and solidarity seem somehow more powerful than death and destruction. In this way the *Iliad* concludes by pointing beyond con-

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ventional heroic values toward an ethic of humaneness and compassion.

Although it is a “conventional heroic value,” I argue that Homer’s treatment of *kleos* also serves to point the audience towards this existential solidarity. The *Iliad*’s emphasis on *kleos* as something transmitted by and for people yet unborn communicates the fact of a future that will continue to arrive and exist regardless of any personal loss. Moreover, this emotional resolution—the affirmation that the characters’ suffering and death was not meaningless and that humanity carries on even after the devastation of the Trojan War—relies on the way that *kleos* reveals our own place in the story as the future audience in whom the characters place their hopes for im-

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mortality. Homer doesn’t know how the heroes of the *Iliad* can escape the escalating, self-perpetuating violence of warrior heroism any more than we as an audience know how to accept the tenuous, impermanent nature of human mortality, but the existence of *kleos*—of future generations to immortalize and mythologize the past in song—assures us that neither problem is hopeless. *Kleos*, Homer says, isn’t unambiguously good. It’s not something necessarily worth pursuing. But its existence guarantees that life will go on.

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K. Reinhardt, “Tradition und Geist im homerischen Epos” in *Tradition und Geist: Gesammelte Essays zur Dichtung* (Göttingen, 1960), quoted in Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 67.

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Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 187.

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Cf. de Jong, “The Homeric Narrator,” 201-206, on Homer’s own knowledge of the immortality of poetry and his

role as the poet.

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