

Tu Familia es lo Mas Importante: Hector, Achilles, and the Reframing of Heroic Masculinity and
its Legacy in the *Iliad*.

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Introduction:

To properly frame my project, I must first tell you a story about my family. My father comes from humble beginnings and is the fifth of nine children. He grew up very poor in a household with limited access to food and water. To put food on the table, my grandfather would take him and his brothers out to the fields to gather vegetables, move materials, or do whatever manual labor they could find. It was hard, back-breaking work, but it taught him to hold firm to the belief that he needed to do whatever was necessary as a provider because “*tu familia es lo mas importante.*” Like many men of his generation, this strict upbringing conditioned my father to *endure* no matter what challenges were placed before him. Unfortunately, when such high expectations are thrust upon the next generation, it creates a mindset in which they are often ill-equipped to navigate in the same ways and creates often unintentional emotional scars that are difficult to heal from. The children of such parents and grandparents hold on to their generational pain like a thorn rooted in their palm, where it festers and, if left untreated, cripples the limb. My father was no exception, even when he married my mother and had his children. Through my dad’s consistent, if unspoken, life of sacrifice, I could go to sleep feeling loved, protected, and safe. I was unaware of the nights he went to bed without eating so that I could or the harassment, racism, and injustice he regularly endured at work because he was not a legal citizen. I had everything a kid could ever want, yet I craved more. I wanted to spend my afternoons playing catch and showing him how fast I could run. I wanted him to say he was proud of me for receiving high marks on an exam. I wanted him to hug me when my world was crumbling and tell me that I would be alright, that I could be a superhero full of determination to succeed despite unwinnable odds—just like him. But having such an epic hero for a father created an almost impossible standard for me to perpetuate as his son. Because my father and grandfather

had such strictly defined ideas of what establishes a man's place in the world, masculinity was a sensitive topic for me as a child that often incited feelings of anxiety and stress because I felt, very early on, that I might not measure up to their legacy. I felt obligated to cast away virtues such as vulnerability, patience, and empathy because, “*un hombre no llora*.” A man was not *weak*. My father and his father did not, as they saw it, emasculate themselves in any way for the benefit of others. Like Atlas supporting the world's enormous weight upon his shoulders against his will, I endured an equal pressure to act “*como un hombre*” by upholding the burdensome values of masculinity that would force me to conform to their preconceived notions of what my value as a son, as a father, or as the hero in my own story would mean to me and, more importantly, to *them* as I grew from a boy into a man.

Given this beginning to my origin story—one that mirrors the childhood experience of many young men—perhaps it should be no surprise that stories of heroism in all forms have seen a resurgence within popular culture. Young men need role models and society at large needs heroes to function, and the latter is one of those immutable truths that connects our world to the one that existed more than two millennia ago. However, as human culture changes, so does our understanding of what a hero is and what they embody, especially since we have an almost exclusive pantheon of male heroes, but conflicting notions of masculinity as applied to these heroes and their behavior¹. Thus, one cannot confine heroism and, by extension, the male hero specifically to a singular definition, even though society often treats masculinity as a monolith. Although there have been attempts at solidifying a description to align with some form of moral compass, heroism is too rich a compass to burden with such generic and often limiting

¹ It is important to recognize that heroic rhetoric remains a highly patriarchal and misogynistic area of study due to the oversaturation of male voices within the pedagogy of heroism. Please note, that I am focusing on the male pantheon of heroes, not to diminish or disregard female heroes, but to connect and better address my story and relationship with masculinity and how classical ideas of masculinity still permeate our lives today.

definitions. When scholars define heroism through a contemporary lens, their description may contain allusions to a prominent societal figure who holds significant political power and uses it to effect change within a community. When considering the hero's impact within structured systems, either through society or culture, Spencer claims, "Before the great man 'can re-make his society, his society must make him'" (1873). Thus, we can infer that a hero's status within their community is not strictly dependent on their actions. Still, through myriad eras of literacy and cultural history, as one can see that a hero most often attains their status through will of the people. This symbiotic relationship provides the hero with great honor, prestige, and glory, while simultaneously requiring incredible sacrifices as the hero must uphold their society's values, a task that often comes with a heavy burden and a tragic loss of life—including the hero's own.

Indeed, the definition of the hero consistently shifts to align with a society's moral values, becoming the creed individuals use to describe their heroes, the setting and period, and often the influences media can have on our perception. As Christianity gains prominence in the Western world, references to a charitable mien or to religious devotion in an individual begins to influence heroic qualifications in marked ways. Here, we see how the juxtaposition of heroic conception in the classical sense and moral code society wishes the hero to uphold shifts to accommodate more Christianized virtues without redrawing the way in which the hero is supposed to behave "as a man" in clearly definable ways², except when we explore the concept of endurance as it connects to suffering. Both the Christianized and the non-Christianized hero needs to experience suffering, or self-sacrifice, on a level that the average person would shy away from, but their reasons for doing so often differ greatly. And yet, there have been countless

² It is not my intention to include overly theological theory into this framework, but it is imperative to note how Christianity remains a patriarchal religion and therefore the Christian heroes inherit the benefits of the Homeric heroes' well established-legacy.

attempts throughout history to find an appropriate definition for men and women whose achievements warrant their celebration, even if the heroes themselves engage in questionable methods to accomplish their goals. Male heroes, in particular, whether through literature or real life, are often “more than” in terms of their physical, mental, or secular abilities, even if they are not precisely *good* or *just* when it comes to their behavior. Although heroes can be great individuals capable of effective change, we cannot view their accomplishments and status through unassuming black-and-white perspectives; one’s achievements do not inherently imply they are good or bad as people, especially without proper and careful context to accompany their actions. There are shades, deep and muddled with conflicting opinions and expectations, prevalent throughout mythology, allowing readers and scholars to explore the intricacies of heroism in various cultures over vast amounts of time.

Given this framework, Homer’s *Iliad* gives us a myriad of examples of this complex problem, which leaves readers wondering: who is the real hero of this story? And, more importantly, by what standards should we judge their actions? Indeed, generations of scholars claim Achilles, son of Peleus, is the ultimate example in this work evident when Levin states, “The greatest of the Achaeans was bound to become, in their descendants’ eyes, the most *exemplary* character in the *Iliad*, for Greeks could not possibly esteem the greatest of the Trojans as much” (41). The phrase ‘exemplary character’ and its emphasis permits the reader to consider Achilles as a morally upstanding figure when his actions, especially through his treatment of Hector’s body, towards the end of the poem say otherwise. Levin compares Hector and Achilles and deems Hector less than because of his assumption that Achilles’ character is far greater than that of the Trojan here, yet they do not insinuate nor implicate Achilles’ honor-less actions in not allowing the Trojans to grieve and mourn Hector’s death properly. Despite this unwavering

devotion to Achilles as the hero of Homer's Trojan War epic³, I will argue in the pages that follow that it is Priam's son, the mighty Hector, who is in fact Homer's answer to these age-old questions because, while Achilles and Hector are both mighty warriors, it is not their battle prowess alone that holds the reader captive in this story. Rather, it is the complex moral decisions and the consequences of their actions that allow us to understand, empathize, and mourn their losses, and in this manner, Hector in all ways remains the more emotionally connected to his people, his home, and his family throughout Homer's version of this epic tale. Thus, it is through a reframing of masculine identity as embodied by Achilles and Hector in the *Iliad* that readers begin to understand the duality of heroism, how the burden of masculinity in this arena does not provide closure or solace from the stain of their enemy's blood, and how the response to lingering trauma may often define a hero's character. In this manner, Homer's *Iliad* provides a template for a different type of hero than the classical archetype presented in literature, and even though we claim that society has changed in its views of what constitutes a "real man," contemporary readers continue to fixate on Achilles to the exclusion of Hector to normalize the problematic notion that savage and wrathful depictions of masculinity are how a true hero should behave. By analyzing how Homer uses *The Iliad* to inform readers of the selfless, nurturing aspects of masculinity through Hector as he interacts with his wife and son, it becomes evident that Homer attempts to use his text to create a humane and empathetic heroic identity—to show us that there are human beings with real emotions behind their masks and the roles they must play as warriors and leaders. Therefore, by dismantling the heroic model with *The Iliad of Homer* and its critical legacy, we can challenge the pervasive, harmful, and stereotypical definitions surrounding courageous discourse and rehabilitate Ancient Greek heroes

³ Traill repeatedly implies that Hector's inability to face Achilles in battle is telling of his cowardice and therefore his inferiority to Achilles.

like Hector and Achilles. Most importantly, by examining Hector in greater detail, readers will discover an alternative to the stereotypical heroic model in contemporary literature and media, which negatively influences young men's perception to consider anger, wrath, and violence as necessary tools to define their masculinity.

Classical Masculinity:

When discussing Ancient Greek masculinity, discourse often gravitates around the idea of a warrior society and how honor and strength serves as guiding principles, in fact Stephanie Triggs observes the following in her article, "Honor, Shame, and Degradation" when considering honor and shame within heroic society, "to be victorious in a rightful battle [to "slay" in a knightly fashion] is to accrue honor; while to be cowardly or unjust in one's victories, or to flee from battle altogether, is to accrue shame" (129). It is interesting that Triggs references the word "accrue" within her text because this implies that honor and shame serve as transactional actions for heroes and warriors. Therefore, through their logic, a warrior like Hector cannot be dishonorable when he retreats from battle because his reputation as an honorable warrior precedes him. Consistency and longevity are prominent factors for a warrior's reputation, and Hector's dominance throughout the war allows him to still be considered honorable even when he uncharacteristically retreats when another warrior presses their advantage. This is important to note because readers may be quick to claim that Hector is a coward and therefore cannot be honorable when one or two scenarios should not determine the hero's worth, nor the perception of their masculinity. Moreover, the Homeric hero finds themselves thrust upon a battlefield and far removed from the complacency of routine Greek life. And so, it invites the opportunity to witness masculinity detached from typical societal norms as they embrace and identify themselves the within homosocial male hierarchy war permits. Therefore, due to the mandates of

a war-based society, honor, strength, and power become essential tenets of the masculine code. When these tenets are called into question, Homer observes masculinity taking shape and calls for the community of men at war to set the rules of their behavior—often to disastrous effect. An example of this can be seen when a fight ensues between Achilles and Agamemnon, two hot-headed and prideful warriors who believe their interpretation of battle is the most just and honorable. While the Greeks are united as an army in their conquest of Troy, they are composed of various city-states loosely coming together under a singular banner. Tension is prevalent among the various kings, of whom Achilles and Agamemnon are just two, and this friction over who has ultimate power causes division and isolation in their ranks.

Agamemnon refuses to return Chryseis of the fair cheeks to her father in favor of the ransom: “Never let me find you again, old sir, near our hollow / ships, neither lingering now nor coming again hereafter, / for fear your staff and the god’s ribbons help you no longer. / The girl I will not give back; sooner will old age come upon her in my own house, in Argos” (1. 26-30). Agamemnon is so displeased with the father’s request that harshly rebukes him and threatens to take Chryseis as his bride for the rest of her life, even though he already has a queen in Argos. Through Agamemnon’s rage and disregard of Chryseis’ father, we come to see not only Agamemnon’s shortcomings, but also the notion of failed masculinity in action. By refusing to return Chryseis’, Agamemnon, as king and leader, informs the reader that he is unworthy of leading his people and therefore he is not a great man for not putting his people above his interests, contrary to a hero like Hector that faces his enemies in the name of his people, even when he would much rather be with his family, at peace: “I would feel deep shame / before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, / if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting” (6. 441-443). Homer highlights Hector’s reluctance, weariness, and sullenness

to show that true masculinity requires a responsibility to one's people, that regardless of the trials one endures, you need to be ready to protect and prioritize their needs before yours. Furthermore, Homer continues to show Agamemnon's cowardice when he arrogantly challenges and defies the gods when he mentions the god's ribbons, implying that no amount of worship or divine intervention will force him to relinquish his prize. In retaliation, the god, Apollo, patron deity of Troy, sets his sights and arrows upon the Greek camp and unleashes a volley so fierce that the army is overwhelmed: "He came as night comes down and knelt then / ... Terrible was the clash that rose from the bow of silver / ... Nine days up and down the host ranged the god's arrows" (1. 47-53). In this manner, Homer introduces Apollo to the reader as a manifestation of the level of rage that will later appear within Achilles at the death of Patroclus. *Menis*⁴, or the "wrath of the gods," is this "rage" that most scholars attribute to Achilles and, by extension, contemporary heroes as an excuse for the poor regulation of temperament, or more precisely, it represents an example of how primal rage can often be a justification for loss as if one is mourning through said rage. Tired of watching his men's slaughter at the hands of a vengeful god, Achilles gathers the kings and discusses ways to appease Apollo. In this discussion, Agamemnon rebukes a prophet's words, claiming they only announce grave news of death rather than conquest: "Seer of evil; never yet have you told me a good thing" (1.106). The irony of this scene lies in Agamemnon chastising Achilles when his own arrogance and pride are the root cause of Apollo's wrath. By disrespecting the gods, in particular Apollo, Agamemnon trivializes and desecrates masculine archetypes that often herald Zeus, God of Thunder, as the epitome of power

⁴ *Menis* is the actual Greek word that is translated as "anger" in the opening lines of the poem. However, the word "anger" is too light a translation and does not properly reflect the severe consequences of achieving this level of rage. Additionally, people most often misinterpret the epic's opening sentence, "Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son, Achilles and its devastation" (1. 1-2) as it is a later moment, the death of Patroclus, that incites such rage from him and not his fight with Agamemnon.

and respect. Achilles challenges Agamemnon's words and, in doing so, challenges Agamemnon's authority and leadership in front of his men: "O wrapped in shamelessness, with your mind forever on profit, / How shall any one of the Achaians readily obey you / Either to go on a journey or to fight men strongly in battle?" (1. 149-151). By accusing Agamemnon of "shamelessness" and having a "mind forever on profit," Achilles implies that, not only is Agamemnon unfit to lead warriors into battle, but also his hubris compromises their safety. And, although Achilles cannot convince the other kings to hear his reasoning, Achilles presents valid points through his argument by saying: "Always the greater part of the painful fighting is the work of my hands; / ... and I am minded no longer / to stay here dishonored to pile up your wealth and luxury" (1. 165-171). Achilles has correctly deduced that the current problem's origin is Agamemnon and his greed, but also this shows the reader that Achilles is more than an unthinking brute; rather, he is, a tactical leader who will not permit his warriors to suffer because of another king's negligence.

While Agamemnon threatens to strip Achilles of his prize, a reader may argue that Achilles needs to obey Agamemnon because he is the leader of the Greeks, but blind obedience to a king that does not serve his people is not courageous, nor is it appropriate for masculine attributes. To protect, represent, and honor your people, sometimes you need to speak from the heart, uninhibited, and unphased of others' opinions. Because, of if Achilles does not speak up, then who will? While Homer advances the plot during this altercation, he also ponders the dichotomous assertions that men should serve without question while stressing the importance of personal honor in the shaping of the male identity and ego. Let us not mistake the basis of this argument, as it is not really about who claims what war prize or why, but it is truly about the disrespect and lack of honor that Agamemnon shows Achilles and his warriors by suggesting he

has claim to Briseis or that he is the greater hero than Achilles in the first place. In their article, “Achilles’ Alienation in Iliad 9” James Arieti states, “[Achilles’] heroism must be greater than that of any hero, or else he will not receive the glory that has been promised him. To attain that new and greater glory, he must earn it; and he cannot earn it if he does the same thing as others”

(2) Achilles must challenge Agamemnon in this moment and in several others through the *Iliad* in order to protect his reputation as a warrior and to preserve his legacy as well as that of his father’s, which has been placed in peril by Agamemnon’s greed and careless actions.

Additionally, in challenging Agamemnon he asserts himself as his equal, if not, his superior. Doing so not only allows Achilles to attain greater prestige but shows that he is not content in elevating another man’s glory. And so, when Agamemnon challenges Achilles’ honor, Achilles must challenge him in return to maintain his status as a demigod, as the greatest Greek warrior at Troy, and the immortal legacy of his father that will be inherited by his son once Achilles is gone.

A battle between two great warriors can be a dance. One cannot think of a more fitting analogy when we describe Achilles and Hector’s relationship, as they spent the better part of seven years tiptoeing around each other. As the two greatest warriors of their respective factions, it was customary to participate in a single battle to determine the war’s victor. However, this would prove to be a problematic strategy for various reasons. The most prominent is the prophecy that Achilles’ death will come to pass if he chooses to go to war against Troy:

My mother Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me

I carry two sorts of destiny towards the day of my death. Either,

if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,

my return home is gone, but my glory shall be everlasting;

but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,
 the excellence of my glory is gone, but there will be a long life
 left for me, and my end in death will not come to me quickly. (9. 410-416).

Therefore, as the greatest warriors of their nations, it was counterintuitive to face such a significant loss early in the war. Regardless, events came to pass that would allow the great warriors to meet on the battlefield. And yet, Achilles came to find great glory for defeating Hector and Hector drew great sympathy from readers and scholars through Achilles' savage treatment of his body post-mortem. Most people gloss over the fact that these two heroes needed each other to achieve their destinies. Without Hector's defeat of Patroclus, Achilles' closest friend and partner, Achilles would have spent the rest of his days walking the beaches of Troy, waiting for Hector to lead the Trojans to victory. They may not have seen eye-to-eye, but not only was each warrior of reflection of the other, both men are the firstborn sons of prestigious kings. They share the same values and beliefs regarding their duties as combatants, embracing honor and glory as measures of their prowess as warriors. The key difference between the two warrior is their motivation and priorities. Achilles comes to Troy seeking everlasting glory; However, his mother and various prophets foresaw his death if he participated in the war, and he *chose* to join the efforts to claim Troy. As a reader, I find it difficult to sympathize with his decision, but as a man, I find the ability to move forward and blaze your path, admirable. Meanwhile, Hector is hell-bent on protecting his family from would-be conquerors. And while the Greeks play at war, familiar sentiment is lost within their community. In book six, Hector offers a glimpse at the reality the Trojans will face if the Greeks breach the walls:

There will come a day when sacred Ilion shall perish,
 and Priam, and the people of Priam of the strong ash spear.

But it is not the thought of my brothers who in their numbers and valor
 shall drop in the dust under the hands of men who hate them,
 as troubles me the thought of you, when some bronze-armored
 Acaian leads you off, taking away your day of liberty (6.448-455).

In a heartfelt and emotional moment of truth, vulnerability, and introspection, Hector lays bare his soul to his wife, admitting that he fears her imprisonment at the hands of the Greek warriors. However, the grim reality applies to all citizens of Troy, as their culture, society, and way of life will cease to exist in the span of a single night. Greek soldiers will rape Trojan women and enslave their children; their family heirlooms and worldly possessions will be divvied up amongst the kings to line their pockets with more coin. To Hector, this war is not a game—if he loses, it means the total erasure of his people’s culture, legacy, and way of life. A complete and utter genocide of Trojan values and history.

Another example of Hector’s unique brand of empathetic masculinity lies in his interactions with his son. Like my father, Hector shoulders the burden of providing for and protecting his family and he is quick to address their concerns and relieve them of any worries. While talking with his wife, Andromache, Hector reaches out to his newborn son and delicately holds him in his arms. And yet, his son is frightened at the site of his father, proud and menacing, gazing at him:

So speaking glorious Hektor held out his arms to his baby,
 who shrank back to his fair-girdled nurse’s bosom
 screaming, and frightened at the aspect of his own father,
 terrified as he saw the bronze and the crest with its horse-hair,
 nodding dreadfully, as he thought, from the peak of the helmet (6. 466-470)

Within this scene, we come to see Hector interact with his son, and showing the vulnerability that only his family is allowed to see. The depiction of him wearing his ‘bronze and the crest with its horse hair’ shows his prominence and power as the Trojan militaries general. It is not surprising to see how a child can be intimidated by such an imposing figure, but instead of chastising or yelling at the child to calm himself, as Achilles did to Patroclus, Hector laughs, “Then his beloved father laughed out, and his honored mother, / and at once glorious Hektor lifted from his head the helmet / and laid it in all its shining upon the ground” (6. 471-473). Not only is Homer using this interaction to further develop Hector’s character to reflect the kindness and gentleness that is often missed throughout the work, but he intentionally juxtaposes this scene to mirror that of Achilles and Patroclus’ later in the poem. As a warrior, Hector’s armor not only protects him while in battle, but proclaims his status as the greatest Trojan hero. The importance of a hero’s armor is so deeply ingrained within the text’s lore that Homer goes out of his way to describe the importance of various combatants stripping an opponent’s armor to show their dominance:

Son of Atreus, Menelaos, illustrious, leader of armies:
 give way, let the bloody spoils be, get back from this body,
 since before me no one of the Trojans, or renowned companions,
 struck Patroklos down with the spear in the strong encounter.
 Thereby let me win this great glory among the Trojans
 before I hit you and strip the sweetness of life from you” (17. 12-17)

By claiming another person’s armor, heroes are establishing themselves as top performers by building up their honor and glory. In fact, when the body is left unclaimed, it seems that there is a great desire to fight over it to announce themselves the victor and bask in the spoils of war.

Moreover, the signification of another warrior wearing your arm holds the passive understanding that you have battled and lived, not only showing your great skill as a warrior, but showing that other men are inferior. Therefore, when Hector willingly discards his armor, one can infer that it would be the equivalent of reducing their station, or not upholding the masculine code of honor prevalent within Ancient Greece. Instead, I argue that this is a reflection of Hector's priorities. He is willing to desecrate his armor, a proud Trojan artifact, to calm his son, showing the reader that masculinity is not a set binary, but a fluid and transformative archetype which allows a warrior to show virtues such as patience and understanding, especially when in the presence of loved ones. While a hero has to face their opponents with a callous nonchalance, they must be adaptable and show those they are seeking to protect a nurturing side.

Generational Trauma:

This notion of generational heroic trauma, as presented in the *Iliad*, is not entirely unfamiliar in the contemporary world. While I would hazard the guess that most young men, such as myself, do not consciously consider all aspects of masculinity when we go about our day, it is undoubtedly something that becomes engrained in our psyches through everyday exposure to the male figures in our lives, who like the fathers of Achilles and Hector both covertly and overtly perpetuate the idea of upholding family legacy at all costs. Like a rite of passage, young men observe and execute masculinity through imitation, but masculinity does not have a consciousness of its own. Therefore, it is not a tool that is inherently good or evil, simply a state of being dependent on the moral compass of its owner that can be dangerous if wielded incorrectly. For example, a hammer in the hands of an unjust person can cause harm and even destroy lives, but a hammer in the hands of good people can build, create, and provide shelter. In this same way, masculinity can be a tool of destruction or creation, depending on how a person

uses it. Although many may view masculinity as a wholly destructive force, it is imperative to allow context and understanding to guide one's thoughts. It is not masculinity that shackles and corrupts young men to behave in toxic ways; rather, it is the societal pressures and expectations to act in ways that are antithetical to empathy and love because these are seen as emasculating. As men, it is common to hear that we are often recluses and do not share feelings easily, and this stems from an upbringing not dissimilar to my own that taught me that a man cannot and should not shed tears because that is showing the world a weakness that they can exploit. In my neighborhood, that was the unspoken rule that all boys needed to follow regardless of the situation. In hindsight, it was an absurd, if not cruel, rule to adhere to because it limited our emotional development and paved the way for many of the more negative aspects of male identity to emerge. We could not be loving, so many of us chose to be angry instead—just like Achilles. Of course, we could try to be different, but emotional expression never earned our fathers' respect, and we understood that tears did nothing but announce your weakness to the world. If disappointing your father was not bad enough, there was a societal pressure to not disgrace yourself by being compared to a girl. Sexist comments like, “No llores, no eres una niña chiquita” were often used to demean, ridicule, and shame the boys, as if the worst thing to be in life was a girl. Though shaming a man for crying is not a new and groundbreaking concept, the chastising of men for showing emotions other than pride, rage, or sullenness has persisted for millennia, as one can see in the *Iliad* when Achilles ridicules Patroclus' tears:

Why then

Are you crying like some poor little girl, Patroklos,
 who runs after her mother and begs to be picked up and carried,
 and clings to her dress, and holds her back when she tries to hurry,

and gazes tearfully into her face, until she is picked up?

You are like such a one, Patroklos, dropping these soft tears. (16. 6-11)

In this moment, Achilles complain that Patroclus' tears are counterintuitive, as they are both a distraction for Achilles and they bring shame to both Patroclus as well as to all the Myrmidons. When the greatest Greek warrior and, by proxy, the greatest Greek man, insinuates that shedding tears for lost lives is a sign of weakness, it sets a precedent amongst the warriors to slaughter their emotions to give way to a "stronger" conception of masculinity. And yet, Achilles misses the point of Patroclus tears because his arrogance and pride clouds his judgement. His indecision and disregard for the war has caused significant casualties. Again, Achilles is unaware of how his actions negatively impact those around him. And yet, there is a glimmer of some deeper emotion because it is only the vulnerability that Patroclus shows here that allows Achilles to acquiesce to Patroclus' request to allow the Myrmidons to rejoin the fighting, even though Achilles himself will not: "But even so, Patroklos, beat the bane aside from our ships; fall / upon them with all your strength; let them not with fire's blazing / inflame our ships, and take away our desired homecoming." (16. 80-82). Achilles references Patroclus great strength and his approval of this mission implies that not only does he trust Patroclus to carry it out successfully, but he also so greatly believes that Patroclus will succeed that he is willing to sacrifice his own opportunity to potentially be seen as the greatest of the Greeks. The allusion of a homecoming also allows us to consider Achilles' position, he comes across as weary of combat and hopeful that if successful his burden will be lifted from his shoulder. For a moment, he considers not being tasked with being the greatest, instead he can relish in his dream of returning home. In this scene, Homer shows that ancient Greek masculinity inhibits the expression of compassion or empathy unless directed toward family, just as it continues to do in the contemporary world.

Furthermore, if you are a “real man,” then no remorse can be shown to one’s enemy, as seen through the desecration of the corpses of various heroes and the pilfering of their armor from their lifeless bodies. In their article, “Competing Constructions of Masculinity in Ancient Greece,” Rubarth informs their reader of the paradigm of how the paradigm masculinity often inhabits by stating, “When masculinity is discussed, it usually arises when an individual fails to perform masculinity to the standards of the community. In such cases of failed masculinity... We get glimpses of the normative paradigm behind the ideal of masculinity” (22). And so, through Rubarth’s statement we can infer that the performative action of masculinity must correlate with the idealistic model of a heroic man that does not fail. He references the normative paradigm to highlight how a hero’s failure and shunning of the community is a cyclical example of the burdens communities perpetuate across generations to uphold stereotypical ideals. Like heroism, masculinity’s values result from the standards the community or society place upon the model or individual. Men are shackled to these standards by millennia of rhetoric prohibiting emotional expression and openness. Like the young boys in my neighborhood, the men of Ancient Greece had to learn to cast away their tears and, by extension, their hearts, to fit in and make their patriarch proud. Moreover, this notion of masculinity within failure stifles the individual and promotes unrealistic expectations within young men to assume that they can only be men if they are continuously victorious⁵, a feat that not even the great Achilles could accomplish. Unrealistic as it is, this is the dilemma most men find themselves in, a continuous cycle of victory without reprieve in order to gain acceptance. This weight rests upon their shoulders as society continues to push them to past their physical and emotional limits. In doing so, we disregard the very real

⁵ Classical heroes were often called by their father’s name as much as their own so their victories and defeats were almost a more their father’s than theirs. In this way, their father’s legacy continued to grow even if they no longer fought on the battlefield.

need that men have for closure, healing, and acceptance, and we often ignore the vicious cycles they find themselves trying to live up to an almost unobtainable and highly flawed notion of masculinity that has been passed down generation after generation until they become nothing more than a rage-filled monster who thinks nothing of dragging the lifeless corpse of his “enemy” behind his chariot in a grotesque depiction of victorious revenge.

Conclusion:

Legacy can be an oppressive and burdensome weight that is passed on from fathers to sons. In Ancient Greece, a father’s name often followed their sons because names hold great power. However, they also inform readers of lineage; through Achilles and Hector, not only does Peleus and Priam’s character, heritage, and legacy exist in the *Iliad* and beyond, but also the binding of a son’s legacy to that of his father allows a father to attain even greater prestige as their son wins battle after battle in their names. Similarly, in contemporary times, a man’s last name carries the burden of extending his father’s legacy. None find this task more burdensome than the firstborn son whose life carries the weight of their fathers’ name. It is a privilege to be your father’s namesake and an honor to participate in preserving the name through marriage or prestige. Yet, an inherent trauma accompanies the weight of this generational legacy, a fear present among all young men that they will never be as great as their first hero—their father. Moreover, the ominous shadow cast amongst son constantly plagues their everyday thoughts because they know that, regardless of merit, achievement, or moral character, they can never measure up to the heroic figure they built in their heads, and it is not until much later in life that they realize that their fathers and their views of what constitutes a “real man” might be terribly flawed.

Hector's conquests are a testament to his heroic attributes. Still, others impress that without divine intervention, Hector's worth within the story amounts to nothing more than an underqualified prince who has no business leading men to war. Perspective is paramount because the reader must understand how oral narratives such as the *Iliad* influence and pander to nationalistic ideals. While little is known of Homer's life, we see that he is a Greek citizen, so he is inherently biased to favor the Greek army and portray their actions as just or necessary. Therefore, readers can argue that the *Iliad* amounts to Greek propaganda in ancient time or, another example of colonizers subverting and desecrating original material to fit their narrative. And yet, evidence shows how Homer moves away from showing outright bias, choosing to highlight the hero's shortcomings as much as their victories. Events such as Achilles' refusal to participate in a majority of the poem, while understandable within the microcosm of heroic masculinity reflected against the backdrop of war, highlight how selfish motivations often harm the people that trust and rely on heroes to be "more than." Additionally, by showcasing Achilles' impassiveness, Homer criticizes his heroic status because one cannot be a hero if inaction plagues their motivation.

Homer takes the opportunity to highlight other great warriors throughout the poem like Ajax, Odysseus, and Hector who shine brightly throughout the epic by effectively using their skillsets and gifts to be productive members within the warrior society. Then, we ask, why would Homer use Hector to show the poem's humanity? Why is the enemy given the courtesy of pity rather than the Greek heroes? Although Homer should be inclined to paint Hector negatively by addressing his imperfections as a hero, it is Hector's *humanity* that shines brightest throughout the poem—specifically his interaction with his family. Achilles journeys to Troy for glory and a type of immortality that goes together with a superficial conception of legacy. Regardless, his

name becomes tied to his rage, “Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus’ son Achilles and its devastation” (1. 1-2). Homer opens the epic by invoking the muses and equating Achilles’ anger to a destructive force capable of causing travesties near the same level as most gods. Names have power, and identity within literature is essential because it gives the reader insight into the character’s motivation. An inability to contemplate the hero’s mindset complicates the relationship between the character and reader, thus causing a disconnect that hinders our ability to show sympathy when our hero undergoes traumatic experiences. And so, most readers cannot understand, relate, or sympathize with a *god* like Achilles in the same way they would Hector because Achilles’ plight seems selfish and derived from a problem of his own making. In contrast, Hector is fighting to protect his home, family, and legacy from oppressors. Yet, we must learn to understand Achilles because within his unwavering desire to uphold his honor and ensure his legacy; we also find a lost soul plagued by the burden of his decision and his father’s decisions before him. Thus, defining the word requires the tearing down of archaic model which propagates the generational trauma that binds and perpetually afflicts individuals like Achilles and Hector. They are their father’s sons, forcing themselves to carry an impossible burden as they try to become their own men.

There is a real possibility that I will never reach the altitudes of heroism and masculinity that my father and grandfather expected of me from a young age. And I would be remiss to admit that in my lowest moments, the thought of disappointing my dad haunts me at night. It is easy to dream of being a hero, but harder to live up to the expectations. And yet, my dad has done it for the past 26 years and continues to be the north star of my life. As he grows older, I can see how the heavy burden of his sacrifices has taken a toll on his body and, for once, the unwavering symbol of hope that has upheld my family for decades cannot be the undaunted pillar of strength

that he once was. It is difficult to admit, that in time, he will look to me for help as I once did for him, and therein lies the bittersweet realization that time is finite, and the halcyon days of my youth have undergone a metamorphosis as I mature into the man he raised me to be. As I step into his shoes, I ponder the legacy he leaves in my care, understanding the countless years he spent, sacrificing his body, his blood, sweat and tears to allow me reprieve from a difficult life. While I spent years seeking the answers to masculinity, I was blind to the truth, that there is no greater example of heroic masculinity than that of a father that loves his family and will do anything to protect them.

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