

Hector's Deprivation of *Nostos*:
A Comparative Analysis of the Costs of War for Homeric Heroes

The lives of Achilles and Odysseus, the protagonists of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, differ in their approaches to the theme of returning home. While Achilles sacrifices *kleos* for the sake of *nostos* (see Rengakos 2002, 186), Odysseus achieves both *kleos* and *nostos* simultaneously (see Nagy 1979 and Grethlein 2017).

This article argues that the *nostos* theme is significant for Hector as well, the other protagonist of the *Iliad*. Both Homeric poems hint at Hector's own deprivation of a return home, introducing it through comparisons with Achilles' similar fate and through resonances with Odysseus' contrasting achievement of *nostos*. Overall, this analysis underscores the personal cost of Hector's pursuit of military glory.

In Section 1, I analyze the conclusion of the *Iliad* in relation to the *nostos* theme. As Jáuregui 2011 and others have argued, in Book 24, Priam achieves his own *nostos* after visiting Achilles, as he is able to return to Troy. During his visit, Priam draws a close parallel between Hector and Achilles (24.486–502). In these lines, Priam contrasts the tragic fate of his son Hector with Peleus' hope for the *nostos* of his son Achilles. However, since the audience already knows from Achilles' early prophecy (1.352-354) that this hero will not return home, this contrast instead highlights a parallel between Hector and Achilles: both heroes not only face tragic deaths, but are also deprived of *nostos*.

Section 2 reinforces the idea of Hector's deprivation of *nostos* by examining Cassandra's words later in Book 24: "Come, men of Troy and Trojan women, look upon Hector, if ever before you rejoiced (χαίρετ') when you saw him return alive from battle (εἴ ποτε καὶ ζῶοντι μάχης ἐκ νοστήσαντι); for he was a great joy to his city and all his people." The phrase νοστῆσω ἐκ μάχης appears only three times in the *Iliad* (Il. 5.157, 17.207, and 24.705–707), the latter two specifically referencing Andromache's unrealistic hope that Hector will return home, and Cassandra's nostalgic

recollection of a lost time when people rejoiced at Hector's *nostos*. Analyzing these "resonances" (for a definition of them, see Graziosi and Haubold 2005, 61; for a survey of theory, see Nelson 2023, 27–51) suggests that Hector's deprivation of *nostos* is a firmly established theme at the end of the *Iliad*, having been foreshadowed throughout the poem.

Section 3 shifts from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*, offering a reassessment of Book 10, particularly the moment when Odysseus returns from Circe's palace to the companions he left by the ship (407–421). The narrator thus comments on their joy: "For them, it was as if they had come home to rugged Ithaca, where they were born and raised" (415–417). De Jong (2001, 264) compares the companions' overwhelming joy to how "the Trojans identify Hector with the salvation of Troy." On closer examination, the companions' speech to Odysseus includes the lines: "With you back, Zeus-born, we are as happy (σοὶ μὲν νοστήσαντι, διοτρεφές, ὧς ἐχάρημεν) as if we had returned to our native Ithaca" (Od. 10.419–420). This phrase resonates with the words νοστήσαντι and χαίρει used by Cassandra in her aforementioned speech in *Iliad* Book 24. The resonance underscores a crucial difference between Odysseus and Hector: while Odysseus is reunited with his companions and will eventually return to Ithaca, Hector is deprived of *nostos*, as Cassandra sorrowfully laments.

In conclusion, this paper reflects on the importance of *nostos* as a key theme that highlights significant differences among the major heroes of the Homeric poems. The analysis brings Hector closer to his enemy Achilles, especially as depicted in the closing moments of the *Iliad*, while distancing Hector from Odysseus, even though the two heroes share a similar approach to leadership (e.g., Tagliabue 2024).

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