



Article

The Language of Heroism: Linguistic and Artistic Dimensions in Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey*

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines how the distinct linguistic characteristics and narrative structures of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* contribute to their contrasting portrayals of heroism, with a particular focus on the ethical dimensions of their protagonists. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research utilizes content analysis guided by Peirce's semiotic theory to decode the layers of meaning embedded in the epics. Primary data consists of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in their original Ancient Greek and English translations, supplemented by scholarly commentaries. Specific episodes featuring Achilles and Odysseus were selected and analyzed for key linguistic elements, including diction, epithets, metaphors, and dialogue. The analysis reveals that heroism is conveyed through distinct semiotic patterns across six categories: Heroic Strength and Physicality, Divine Influence and Fate, The Heroic Journey and Struggle, Heroism and Sacrifice, and Moral and Ethical Dimensions, alongside Family and Loyalty. For instance, Achilles' heroism is often indexed by "swift-footed" and "great-hearted" epithets, emphasizing physical prowess and emotional depth, while Odysseus' is marked by "wily" and strategic restraint, highlighting intellectual and moral fortitude. The results underscore that Homeric heroism transcends martial prowess, deeply integrating moral decisions, emotional struggles, and familial loyalty as central to heroic identity. These findings challenge simplistic interpretations of Greek heroism, suggesting it encompasses an internal journey of moral growth, loyalty, and personal sacrifice, rather than solely a quest for glory through battle. The study highlights the crucial role of moral responsibility, emotional resilience, and family unity in shaping heroic actions and identities, providing a more nuanced and relatable perspective on heroism for contemporary readers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, epic poems attributed to Homer, are among the most significant works in Western literature, having played a crucial role in Greek education and culture, and influencing literary traditions for thousands of years (Janko, 1982; Louden, 2006). These epics written in ancient Greece are more than just a graphic description of heroes' feats; they encapsulate the language of

heroic acts, intermingling linguistic characteristics with artistic discourse to create a story that has echoed through time (Harden & Kelly, 2013; Janko, 1982; Martín, 2005). Homer's depiction of heroism extends beyond sheer might to encompass moral and mental complexity from the perspective of his heroes, Achilles and Odysseus, whose individual odysseys both reflect and inform their people's and civilization's own voyages (Homer et

al., 2011; Jong, 2017).

The epics define heroism as not just the soldierly feat but a complex system that includes issues such as honor, individual sacrifice, and leadership, approached through strong narratives of human experience (Prus, 2009). In particular, the Iliad is not a hymn to war but shows warriors as fickle and capable of self-destructive fury, such as Achilles (Zaidi, 2017). In contrast to the Iliad, the Odyssey embodies a second type of heroism through Odysseus's multiple trials on his journey home, which emphasise cunning, strength, and intellect over might template, as aligns with Campbell's monomyth schema (Al-rikabi, 2025). This distinction highlights a more fundamental difference in the model of ethics embedded in the narrative structures of the two epic poems, one that underlies their treatment of poetic language and thematic resolution (Elmer 2015).

In analyzing the linguistic and artistic elements of these epics, one must also consider how Homer manipulates language to convey and shape the values of heroism, honor, and humanity. Through the use of colourful descriptions, rhythm, metaphor, and other poetic devices, Homer creates a universe where the epic hero is not only an exaggerated representation of their society's ideals but also viewed as a larger-than-life personage; he possesses both strengths and weaknesses (Christensen et al., 2006). Several studies on the epics have focused on mapping distinctive linguistic features in Homeric poetry, where oral tradition and literate production are intricately interwoven (Janko, 1982; Jong, 2019; Zhou, 2024). Some other work on Homeric scholarship has focused more specifically on language in Homer, and particularly on the duality of oral tradition and literacy evident in the composition of Homeric poetry (Elmer, 2015; Prus, 2009). Later works recognize the oral nature of poetry, perceiving in the language an adaptive quality and awareness of potential signification, if not through literacy, for their qualities as skillful designs: a poet, written word aside, who works with traditional diction but does so aware of its poetic capabilities (Scott 2009). Nevertheless, the study of semiotics and ethics in these two epics, particularly in terms of how each distinguishes hero archetypes, is an area for further scholarly inquiry (Dillon 2000; Elmer 2015). This article attempts to fill this gap by exploring how the linguistic, narrative, and cultural

differences between the Iliad and the Odyssey also create a dynamic of difference in these two works' articulations of heroism, with particular reference to their protagonists' ethical purity.

Focusing on the linguistic features of the Iliad and the Odyssey, this paper attempts to demonstrate how Homer's skillful handling of language creates a timeless model for heroism. It will examine the narrative strategies that have made these epics foundational both in the Greek tradition and in the Western literary canon more generally, and how they frame our understanding of what heroic is and how it is presented in literature. By examining the thematic, ideological, and artistic aspects present in these works, this study aims to highlight the relationship between language and heroism in Homer's narrative masterpieces and to investigate how linguistic figurations have sustained their enduring stories.

II. METHOD

Source of Data

For this research, English translations of *The Iliad of Homer* (Lang et al., 1883) and *The Odyssey of Homer* (Fitzgerald, 1963) are the main source of data. They are the materials that should be used as background in an examination of the language and artistry of heroism in epic. These secondary data consist of related publications on the epics, which bring multiple critical interpretations to bear, literary, historical, or cultural (such as studies of oral-formulaic composition or thematic examinations of hero types). This multifaceted treatment provides a thorough examination of how language plays a crucial role in the creation of heroic stories and ethical systems.

Data collection

For data collection, the analysis begins by identifying episodes or passages from each of the two epics, which provide a prominent focal point for the appearance of hero figures Achilles and Odysseus, thereby establishing a clear focus on their linguistic representation. The episodes selected are intended to be analyzed quantitatively for critical linguistic features, including diction, epithets, metaphors, and the structure of dialogue. Additionally, other sources are employed, such as academic commentaries and interpretations of Homeric texts, to provide context for understanding the linguistic expressions while reading into these

identified themes.

Data analysis

This research employs content analysis as the primary method, supplemented by Semiotic Theory/Peirce’s semiotics theory in explaining such reportage (Liszka, 1996). Peircean semiotics analysis centers on examining signs using a trichotomous model (Representamen, Object, Interpretant) and categorization into Icon, Index, Symbol to elicit deeper interpretations in text, media, or culture; by which meaning is projected through similarity (icon), physical linkage (index), and conventionality (symbol). This conceptualization will then be utilized, among other matters, to illuminate the linguistic features in the Iliad and Odyssey that serve as semiotic vehicles of archetypal ideals and ethical vagaries.

It begins with a careful reading of the Iliad and Odyssey to identify central linguistic categories, such as diction, epithets, metaphor, and speech patterns, that are found to be essential for constructing heroism. These motifs are classified as themes, such as honor, fate, and ethical toil. Next, a thematic analysis is employed to determine how Homer utilizes language to reflect the cultural and ideological values prevalent in ancient Greece. Examining the heroes’ interactions and dramatic design, this research explores whether these language choices correspond with cultural norms for hero behavior. Applying the Semiotic Theory, the study analyses what symbolic significance can be attributed to these linguistic structures and how Homer uses language not just as an individual but also as a social phenomenon in constructing the hero.

III. RESULT

This section presents the result of the detailed analysis, focusing on how linguistic choices in the Iliad and Odyssey shape the portrayal of heroism and its associated ethical dimensions, interpreted through the lens of Peirce’s semiotic framework. This involves examining how specific linguistic elements function as representamens, objects, and interpretants to construct the complex moral landscapes and heroic archetypes within these epic poems. The subsequent analysis delves into the intricate interplay between linguistic signifiers and their signified heroic concepts, exploring how Homer masterfully employs various textual

strategies to differentiate the ethical stances of Achilles and Odysseus.

Heroic Strength and Physicality

The ideal of the heroic figure associated with physical strength and valor is a dominant feature in both epics. Achilles and Odysseus are portrayed linguistically as distinct types of heroes in physical and moral terms. In the Iliad, Achilles’ power is repeatedly represented in terms that emphasize his military might and divine ancestry, while Odysseus’s kind of heroism unfolds in a language of endurance, wit, and tactical brilliance. The verbal portrayal of these personages suggests a range of heroic models, from Achilles’ extreme physical dominance to Odysseus’s mental strength and ability to withstand difficult times. This division is significant, as it reveals how Homeric society emphasized both brute strength and intelligent strategy as essential elements of heroic identity, creating a complex and composite portrait of what heroism meant in ancient Greek thought (Nagy 2005). For instance, the epithets of Achilles, ‘swift-footed’ and ‘godlike’, can be considered as iconic signs referring to his velocity and the god’s favor, whereby those are symbols for bodily superiority and force on the battlefield.

Data 1:

Achilles’s Power:

“for he had seen them before beside the fleet ships when **swift-footed Achilles** led them from Ida” (Iliad, 205)

Signifier: “Swift-footed” is a recurrent epithet and indexical sign that highlights Achilles’ extraordinary physical power, particularly in battle.

“Swift-footed” formulaic homeric epithet Indexical marker of speech and combat readiness

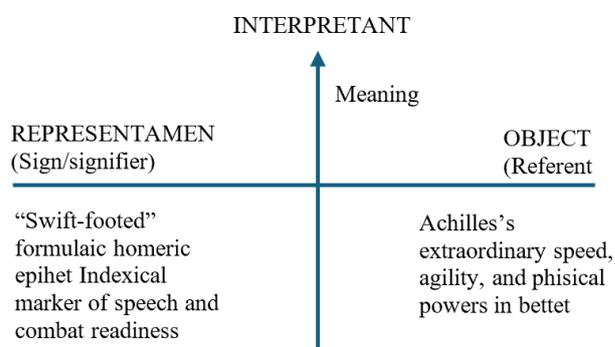


Fig. 1. Peircean triadic sign model of the Homeric epithet “Swift-footed”

The signifier of the sign is “swift-footed” as a linguistic form. It functions in the Homeric epic diction as a formulaic epithet regularly connected to the name of Achilles (Fig. 1). As a physical

sign, it is an indexical mark that refers to the outstanding physical property of speed but also acts symbolically in the poetic system of the epic. Through the repetition of the epithet, the hero is recognized, and their identity is structured across narrative contexts. The sign's object is the quality or concept to which the sign itself refers Achilles' great swiftness, along with his agility and combat prowess. Literally, it recognizes the unparalleled physical strength he demonstrates in battle, his potential to pursue an enemy, and his ability to dominate the battlefield with deadly immediacy. On a grander mythical scale, it also shifts the focus to Achilles as the perfect soldier whose body has something that sets him apart from all the rest of the Achaean heroes. Underneath the epithet of "swift-footed", readers see Achilles as the paradigm for heroic efficiency, a model of speed, authority, and inexorability in battle. The epithet primes listeners to expect decisive action and reinforces Achilles' divine (or rather, semi-divine) status: In Homeric culture, superhuman speed generally indicates divine favor. The interpretant: culturally, speed is itself associated with heroic excellence (aretē), and so by implication makes Achilles an absolute ideal against which others are judged.

Data 2.

Achilles's kindness:

"thus beneath **great-hearted Achilles** his whole-hooved horses trampled corpses and shields together" (The Iliad, 414)

Symbol: This epithet not only signifies Achilles' strength but his emotional depth, illustrating heroism as both physical and moral.

Achilles perceived as a hero whose greatness lies not only in physical strength but in emotional integrity, moral agency, and capacity for honor, anger, compassion, and grief

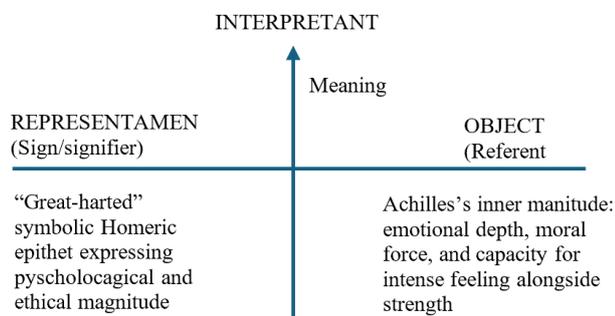


Fig. 2. Peircean triadic sign model of the Homeric epithet "Great-hearted Achilles"

Figure 2 illustrates the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of the Homeric epithet "Great-hearted Achilles" as it appears in *The Iliad*. Within this model, the representamen is the adjective

"great-hearted", which functions primarily as a symbolic sign in Homeric epic discourse. It differs from indexical epithets because here the reference extends beyond observable bodily traits to semiotizations of inner largeness, moral force, or emotional intensity. Symbolic in nature, it is grounded not in direct sensory reference but in shared epic conventions and an audience's understanding of the heroic culture. The referent of the sign is the inner greatness of Achilles, including not just his psychological depth but also his moral capacity to feel intense forms of emotion: anger, pity, loyalty, and sorrow. This object embodies an ideal of heroism in which moral prestige and emotional weight are integral to what defines a hero's identity. Achilles's greatness is hence presented as an internal force that directs his behavior and choices throughout the narrative, especially in conjunction with moments of fighting, withdrawal, and subsequent reconciliation. The interpretant consists in the audience's comprehension that Achilles is, in fact, a multi-dimensional heroic character whose excellence does not only reside in physical performance. By the epithet "great-hearted," both for those who hear and read, Achilles is perceived as having heroism that combines physical strength with a profound emotional and moral force. The sign thus contributes to a complex picture of Achilles and supports Homer's sense that the true heroic greatness lies in the interaction between external action and internal moral content.

Data 3

Wily Odysseus

"But now that **wily man, Odysseus**, muttered" (Odyssey, 337)

Signifier: "Wily" characterizes Odysseus as a hero of intellect, contrasting Achilles' physicality with mental heroism.

Odysseus perceived as a hero whose greatness lies in intelligence, adaptability, and strategic thinking, where survival and success depend on mental agility rather than physical force

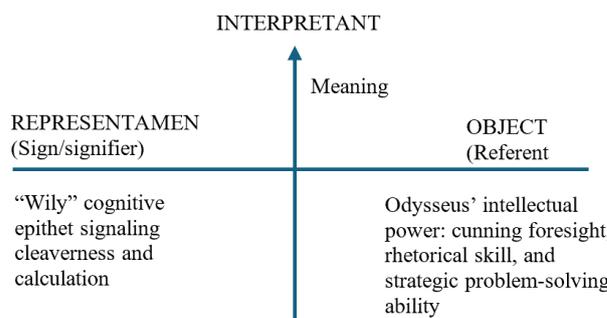


Fig. 3. Peircean triadic sign model of the Homeric characterization "Wily Odysseus"

Figure 3 illustrates the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of the characterization commonly rendered in translation as “wily man, Odysseus” in *The Odyssey*. Within this model, the representamen is the epithet signaling cunning and sharp-mindedness, functioning as a symbolic sign that encodes intellectual capability rather than observable physical traits. Its meaning is carried by Homeric convention and the reader’s awareness of how Odysseus has repeatedly practiced cunning design and linguistic manipulation. The subject of the sign is Odysseus’ intellectual heroism, his cleverness, flexibility, and ingenuity in crafting responses to dire circumstances. It is manifested diegetically in Odysseus’ command of both language and his ability to foresee dangers and recontextualize situations (as in the case of Polyphemus or other tests within the nostos narrative). The interpretant arises in the audience’s apprehension of Odysseus as a distinct hero-category from Achilles. If Achilles’ glory derives from his manhood and corporeality, his physical prowess and sensibilities, then Odysseus finds honor through wits and moderation. The shield thus supports a Homeric dichotomy between warrior virtue and intellectual virtue, depicting cleverness not as an ethical shortcoming but as a valid, even esteemed mode of human achievement within the epic tradition.

Divine Influence and Fate

In both epics, the gods are just divine manifestations of fate that determine the heroes’ fates and, therefore, divinity is essential to heroism. Athena, to name one, persistently aids Odysseus, and even among the Olympian gods, direct interference acts as their journeying and fated destiny (Panteri 2024). This divine intervention underscores an important feature of Homeric heroism: the will of mortal men is enmeshed in cosmic forces already determined, so that even our mightiest heroes act within a destiny presided over by higher powers. Such a subtle interaction of human decision and divine intervention serves to emphasize a profound theological dimension to the Homeric stories, suggesting that epic accomplishment is frequently collaboratively authored through an alliance of human agency and heavenly predestination (Kelly, 2007). This balance of destiny and free will is a constant struggle that deeply influences the heroes’ identities and the moral compasses of their societies.

Data 3

The counsel of Zeus and Achilles

“Now when they had gathered and were met in assembly, then Achilles fleet of foot stood up and spake among them” (The Iliad, 3)

Symbol: Zeus represents divine authority and fate, signifying that even the mightiest hero like Achilles is ultimately at the mercy of the gods.

Achilles prevailed as a heroic figure whose actions and fate, despite unmatched human power, remain subject to divine will and cosmic order embodied by Zeus.

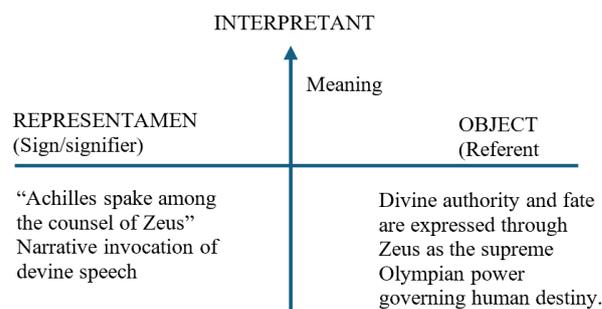


Fig. 4. Peircean triadic sign model of the narrative expression “Achilles spake among them”

Figure 4 illustrates the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of the narrative statement “Achilles fleet of foot stood up and spake among them” from *The Iliad*. In this model, the representamen is clearly evident in the direct act of divine speech, which serves as a symbolic sign or point of reference within Homeric discourse. The counsel of Zeus, as the speaking subject, is immediately identifiable, signaling the functioning of supreme cosmic authority, triggering a web of cultural significance linked to sovereignty, fate, and divine rule. The referent of the sign is divine authority as such, which Zeus personifies as the final decider of fate. This object encompasses not only Zeus’ power to command and intervene but also the larger system of fate within which even gods and heroes operate. The act of speech is not merely communicative; it constitutes divine action that shapes the course of events in the human realm. The interpretant is generated in the reader’s perception of Achilles as a hero with unparalleled power and military skill, which nevertheless does not confer freedom from divine oversight. Rather, the line confirms a fundamental Homeric motif: human heroism finds its place within and finally is subservient to the gods’ purpose. Paged by these constraints, it is the paradoxically restricted definition of heroism that Achilles must work within, making clear his own ambition to the tragic bounds defined by the epic and its cosmological imperatives.

Data 5

Poseidon’s Wrath:

“his ship went down under Poseidon’s blows, gale winds and tons of sea” (The Odyssey of Homer, 436)

Icon: Poseidon, as a god of the sea, symbolizes the unpredictability of fate. His interference forces Odysseus to struggle against nature, marking the divine obstacle in the hero’s journey.

Odysseus prevailed as a hero whose journey is shaped by uncontrollable natural and divine forces, where endurance and resilience are tested against the unpredictability of fate embodied by the sea.

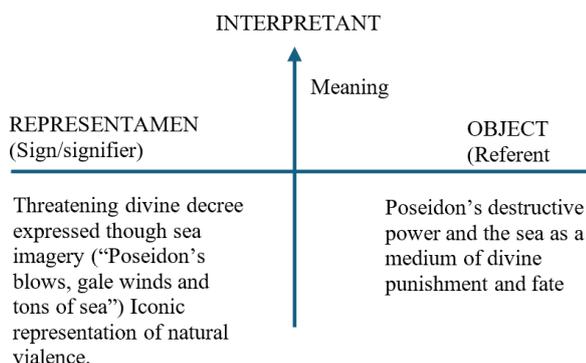


Fig. 5. Peircean triadic sign model of Poseidon’s wrath

Figure 5 represents the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of Poseidon’s declaration, translated as “*under Poseidon’s blows, gale winds and tons of sea*”, from *The Odyssey*. In this model, the representamen is the verbal image of resistless waves turned free by god’s will. The power is used in this image almost exclusively as an iconic symbol; the violence of the sea here is precisely analogous to the instability, danger, and unpredictability that mortals confront when they are left to nature’s mercy. The sign’s referent is the sea, influenced by Poseidon’s divine power, both natural and supernatural. In his capacity as lord of the sea, Poseidon represents nature’s irrepressible quality in the imposition of destiny, the environment coming alive to act as an agent of retribution. Hence, the sea is not just a backdrop; it is the material representation of heavenly enmity towards Odysseus. The interpretant occurs when the audience recognizes that Odysseus’ journey, at its core, was defined by antagonism with the gods. Poseidon’s wrath casts the hero’s journey as a prize fight, not just against physical obstacles, but charges it with cosmic forces beyond human management. This reading supports one of the key themes in *The Odyssey*: heroism is a function not just of smarts and daring, but also of the ability to withstand retribution over time at the hands of capricious divine and natural forces.

The Heroic Journey and Struggle

The journey represents both physical and mental challenges. There should be a series of trials for the heroes, and these stand both for the transformation of one’s personal self (in fact, they often involve some physical change) and a test to see if one really is a hero. The motif of travel serves as a metaphor for both physical and emotional challenges. The heroes will also be put through trials, both as a metaphor for inner change and to test their heroism. This journey is a transition from adventure to nostalgia, reflecting the philosophical contradiction between adventure and returning home, perseverance and the urge to give up, individual cognition, and external forces such as fate (Zhou, 2024). Although human deeds (motivated by individual interests and ambitions) to a very large extent determine those events in the Homeric epics, there is a recognition that certain results are predetermined, beyond the total power of mortals or even gods to change (Sarischoulis, 2016). Homer represents fate as a force even the gods are unable to overcome, although they can weave individual destinies (Liu, 2024).

Data 6

The Lotos-Eaters (The Odyssey, 9.94):

They fell in, soon enough, with **Lotos Eaters**, who showed no will to do us harm, only offering the sweet Lotos to our friend but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotos, never cared to report, nor to return: they longed to stay forever, browsing on that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland. (The odyssey of Homer, 147)

Symbol: The Lotos-Eaters embody the temptation of forgetfulness, representing the struggle to maintain focus and commitment to the heroic journey. This symbolic warning reflects the tension between immediate gratification and the long-term goal of returning home.

Odysseus and his crew, as heroes challenged by distraction and temptation, were succumbing to forgetfulness, which threatens the fulfillment of their long-term heroic journey.

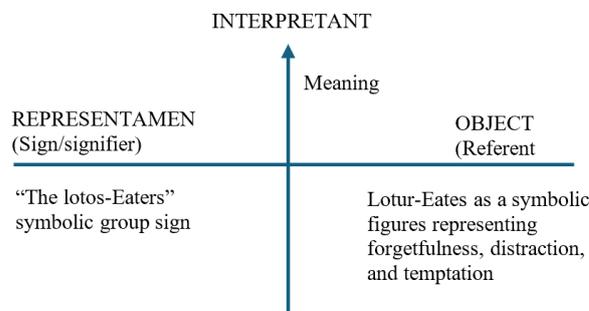


Fig. 6. Peircean triadic sign model of “The Lotos-Eaters”

Figure 6 illustrates the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of the group labeled “*The Lotos-*

Eaters” in *The Odyssey*. The utterance labels these people as lotus-eaters, serving as a metaphorical sign that symbolizes the perils of memory loss and lackadaisical distraction from the task of epic travel. The object of the sign is the existential and psychological danger that immediate pleasure poses to the heroes, the way it jeopardizes their long-term aims. This split is mirrored in the encounter with the Lotus-Eaters, who represent the hedonist short-term pleasures that contrast significantly with maintaining a sustained dedication to one’s goal of nostos, returning home. Due to the effects of the lotus, men who eat it lose any desire to or sense of duty and grow more obsessed with maintaining their own comfort and easy idleness; thus, it makes the Lotos-Eaters not so much a physical barrier as a mental trap. The interpretant is the audience’s comprehension of the episode as a moral and psychological demand. The experience with the Lotos-Eaters confirms that in Homer, heroism is not just about prowess or craft, but also character and psychological fortitude. The story, therefore, underscores the importance of vigilance, self-control, and strategic discernment as essential character traits that are indispensable for the heroic journey to achieve its ultimate destination.

Data 7

Polyphemus

“Poseidon, bears the fighter an old grudge since he poked out the eye of Polyphemos, brawniest of the Kyklopes. Who bore that giant lout?” (The Odyssey of Homer, 3)

Icon: Polyphemus, the one-eyed Cyclops, symbolizes the monstrous and uncivilized forces Odysseus must confront. His single eye represents a distorted or limited perception, which Odysseus must overcome to restore balance.

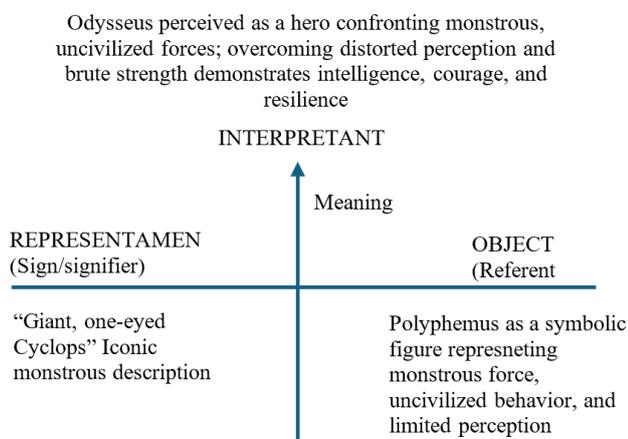


Fig. 7. Peircean triadic sign model of Polyphemus, the Cyclops.

Fig. 7 presents the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of the narrative description of Polyphemus, the one-eyed Cyclops in *The Odyssey*

(9.195). The representamen is the vivid image of his huge, one-eyed figure and acts more as an iconic sign that indicates danger, monstrosity, and limitation in sight. This details physical grotesqueness to indicate Polyphemus’ strength as a force of opposition. The referent of the sign is the Cyclops sculpture as a grotesque and barbaric power, symbolizing violence and a schizophrenic mentality. This single eye represents a restricted view, one that seems short-sighted to the character and the reader of this story of practical reasoning for Odysseus. The interpretant is realized in the audience’s comprehension of Odysseus’s heroism, which encompasses not only physical action but also intelligence, guile, and problem-solving. Odysseus must use his wits to confront Polyphemus, who is stronger and more evil than he is, which contributes to the Homeric idea that heroism requires both thought as well as action. The episode of Cyclopes represents thereby the reconciliation between civility and savagery, human intelligence and brute strength in the epic wandering.

Data 8

The Sirenes, the deathless beings

“the Sirenes will sing his mind away on their sweet meadow lolling. There are bones of dead men rotting in a pile beside them and flayed skins shrivel around the spot”. (The Odyssey of Homer, 210)

Symbol: The Sirenes are symbols of temptation and danger, seducing heroes with their songs. Their portrayal reflects the struggle between desire and the hero’s duty, where Odysseus must resist their allure to continue his journey.

Odysseus is perceived as a hero whose journey demands self-discipline and resistance to seductive distraction, where desire must be subordinated to duty and the long-term goal of returning home.

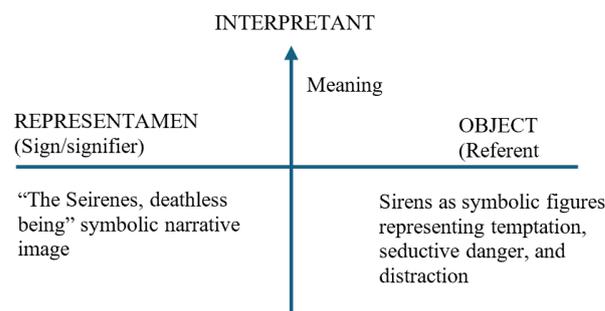


Fig. 8. Peircean triadic sign model of “The Sirenes”.

Figure 8 illustrates the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of the narrative expression “the Sirenes will sing his mind away on their sweet meadow lolling.” in *The Odyssey* (12.191). The representamen is a representation of the immortal, seductive songstresses whose songs tempt sailors to their doom, an iconic sign of temptation that

explains both seafaring prudence and moral peril. The referent of the sign is that of the Sirens as figures of distraction and desire, that imperilled both the hero's concentration and his successful return home. The threat isn't purely physical; it's psychological and existential - the danger of surrendering to short-term pleasure at the expense of long-term goals. The interpretant arises from an audience's recognition that Odysseus' heroism consists of cognitive inhibition, ethical evaluation, and tactical planning. In resisting the temptation to succumb to the Sirens (and only with a little help from lashes and ropes), Odysseus represents Homeric heroism as the disciplined negotiation of external threats while managing your own dark heart. The Sirens episode, therefore, reimagines the epic's treatment of desire, restraint, and moral nuances in the context of heroic adventuring.

Heroism and Sacrifice

In Homer, sacrifice is not just an act of generosity, but also a metaphor for choosing the good and doing what is brave. It perfectly embodies the double aspect of Greek heroism, the glory and the weight of sacrifice. This complex depiction of heroism is consistent with Jungian archetypal theory, which describes figures like Odysseus as representing the morally ambivalent hero whose path involves ambiguity and contradiction, in contrast to straightforward heroic acts (Russo, 2008). This approach recognizes the complexity of human motivation and the psychological underpinnings of epic storytelling (Russo 2008). The archetypal nature of Circe, that enduring pull towards destructive pleasure and temptation that threatens to divert the hero from his main goal in life—the safe return to hearth and home—is repeated with another (twice) goddess, Kalypso (Payne, 2023; Sullivan, 2015). His escapades with the Sirens and narrow miss between Skylla and Charybdis further accentuate his cognitive guile and determination to survive danger, even at considerable personal risk (Guido et al., 2019; Neils, 1995).

Data 9

Achilles' Sacrifice

“All hail to thee, O Patroklos, even in the house of Hades, for all that I promised thee before am I now accomplishing. Twelve valiant sons of great-hearted Trojans, behold these all in company with thee the fire devoureth: but Hector son of Priam will I nowise give to the fire to feed upon, but to dogs.” (The Iliad of Homer, 455)

Sign: Achilles' emotional sacrifice, his return to battle for Patroclus, functions as an index of Greek heroic values, where personal loss and glory are intrinsically tied together in the moral cost of heroism.

Achilles prevailed as a hero whose personal grief and emotional endurance underscore the ethical and moral dimensions of Greek heroism, where glory and loss are inseparable

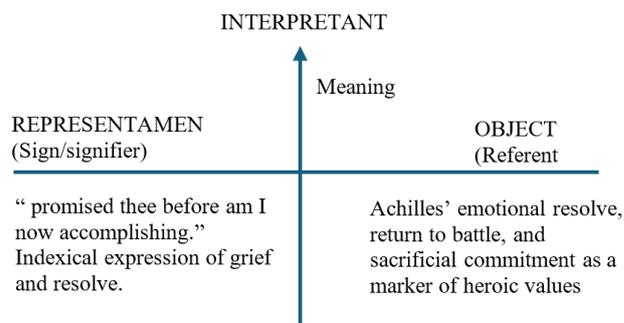


Fig. 9. Peircean triadic sign model of Achilles' Sacrifice

Figure 9 illustrates the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of Achilles' declaration "all that I promised thee before am I now accomplishing." in *The Iliad*. The representamen is Achilles' utterance of steadfastness and stoicism, which operates as an index sign, pointing directly to his moral and emotional state. Through his swan song, Achilles manifests not only personal sorrow for Patroclus but also his succumbing to the heroic function. Achilles' tragic offering, which also appears here as the object of a sign, involves Achilles being willing to fight again, accepting individual danger as part of the sacrifice for atonement, and embodying heroic Greek ethics. The line feels authentic because it presents genuine heroism in response to acts of bodily or tactical valor, as well as personal sacrifice and adherence to duty and the community's values. The interpretant surfaces in the audience's realization of the cultural logic of Homeric heroism: glory, emotional, and moral fortitude are inseparable. Achilles' declaration here expresses the pull between grief, self-serving desire, and the ethical needs of honor and duty. In meeting a kind of emotional pain that is nearly physical, and in actively choosing rather than merely suffering it, Achilles demonstrates a notion of heroism as culturally prescient as it is narratively dynamic.

Data 10

Departing from the gods

“if ever mortal man inquire how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye; Laertes' son, whose home's on Ithaka!” (Odyssey. 160)

Sign: Odysseus' choice to defy the gods by stealing from the Cyclops symbolizes the tension between human will and divine law, a core component of his heroic sacrifice.

Odysseus as a hero whose agency challenges divine authority, highlighting the tension between human will, ethical judgment, and the consequences of heroic transgression.

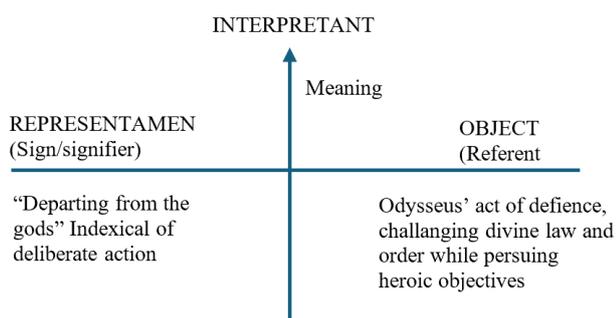


Fig. 10. Peircean triadic sign model of Departing from the gods.

Figure 10 presents the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of Odysseus’ action “*if ever mortal man inquire how you were put to shame and blinded*” in *The Odyssey*. The representamen is the image of his conscious exit from divine power and authority, an indexical sign that indicates intentional rebellion. This act directly implicates the fact that it was an intelligent decision taken by Odysseus to rob the Cyclops in contravention of divine law. The sign’s referent is Odysseus’ moral dilemma of acting as a hero. The defiance represents the human theme of man’s will against divine decree, and when it comes to heroic deeds, an individual may have to make a morally dangerous decision and accept whatever punishment might come with that choice. All of this is taken up in the interpretant as understood by an audience: namely, that heroism involves courage and intelligence but also negotiation between human autonomy and divine oversight. Odysseus’s disobedience highlights that heroic activity is ethically ambiguous, capable of serving one’s strategic ends while also incurring moral and cosmic punishment. This episode is indicative of the complexity of Homeric heroism, presenting a strategic genius that is also a moral quandary, and a continuing struggle between human freedom and divine law.

Moral and Ethical Dimensions of Heroism

The heroes’ actions often involve moral decisions that highlight the ethical dimensions of heroism. Semiotic analysis enables us to decode the heroes’ internal conflicts and moral dilemmas as symbolic acts that represent personal and social values. Semiotic analysis enables us to decode the heroes’ internal conflicts and moral dilemmas as symbolic acts that represent personal and social values. For instance, Odysseus’s journey frequently

involves confronting ethical ambiguities, illustrating that his heroism is not merely about physical prowess, but also about his capacity for moral judgment and navigating complex choices (Elmer, 2015; Müller, 2015). Indeed, Odysseus, while possessing strength and bravery like other heroes, distinguishes himself through traits such as cunning and a remarkable ability to adapt, which frequently place him in ethically challenging situations, thereby broadening the traditional understanding of heroism (Li, 2015).

Data 11

Odysseus’ Moral Dilemma

“Old shipmates, friends, the rest of you stand by; I’ll make the crossing in my own ship, with my own company, and find out what the mainland natives are—for they may be wild savages, and lawless, or hospitable and god fearing men” (The Odyssey of Homer, 150)

Symbol: Odysseus’ decision to withhold from his men emphasizes heroic restraint and the moral responsibility of leadership. This is a symbol of wisdom, where intellectual heroism is tied to ethical choices.

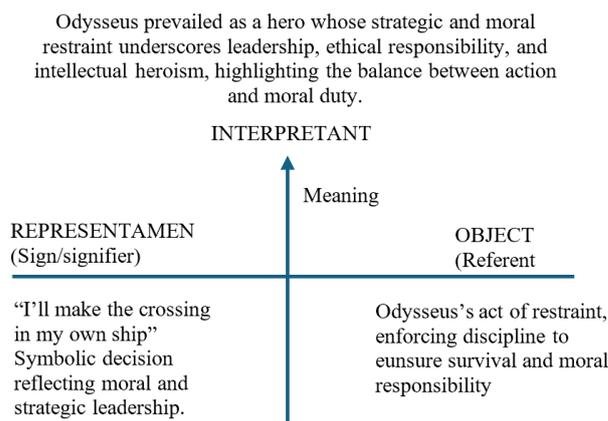


Figure 11. Peircean triadic sign model of Odysseus’ Moral Dilemma (9.175).

Figure 11 presents the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of Odysseus’ statement “*I’ll make the crossing in my own ship*” in *The Odyssey*. The representamen would then be the utterance of Odysseus’ self-control, his disciplined tactics: it is a symbolic sign of moral and intellectual heroism. The referent of the sign is Odysseus’ ethical choice to prioritize the safety and long-term survival of his crew over instant satisfaction, placing them at risk. In holding back supplies, if his state were not given more, he acts not like a leader in a crisis but like a political grifter. The interpretant is the audience’s perception of Odysseus’ heroism as comprising moral responsibility and intellectual acumen. The episode highlights, then, that leadership in the Homeric epic is not just about physical bravery or

tactical smarts, but also about ethical judgment, self-restraint, and the capacity to make morally complex decisions under duress. This reading of the semiotics highlights the integration of intellect, ethics, and strategic vision in the Homeric construction of heroism.

Family and Loyalty

Family is a core symbol of Greek values, and loyalty to family and comrades is central to both Achilles' and Odysseus' heroism. This foundational aspect highlights the socio-ethical frameworks that define heroic identity within the epic narratives, emphasizing communal bonds as integral to individual prowess. Achilles' deep bond with Patroclus and Odysseus' unwavering desire to return to his wife and son exemplify the profound influence of familial and communal ties on heroic motivations and actions (Grethlein, 2017). While Achilles' loyalty is demonstrated through his intense grief and subsequent revenge for Patroclus, Odysseus's enduring decade-long journey home to Ithaca highlights his persistent devotion to his family, showcasing a different, yet equally profound, manifestation of heroic loyalty (Allison & Green, 2020). These differing expressions of fidelity underscore the diverse ethical landscapes within which Homeric heroes operate, balancing personal attachments with broader societal expectations (Richards & Jalšenjak, 2023).

Data 12

Penelope's Loyalty

"With eyes brimming tears she ran to him, throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him, murmuring: "Do not rage at me, Odysseus!" (Odyssey, 435)

Symbol: Penelope's unwavering loyalty is a symbol of fidelity, marking the importance of familial duty in the Greek heroic code.

Penelope is perceived as a paragon of fidelity whose unwavering devotion reinforces the moral and familial dimensions of the heroic narrative. Emphasizing loyalty as a core value in Greek culture

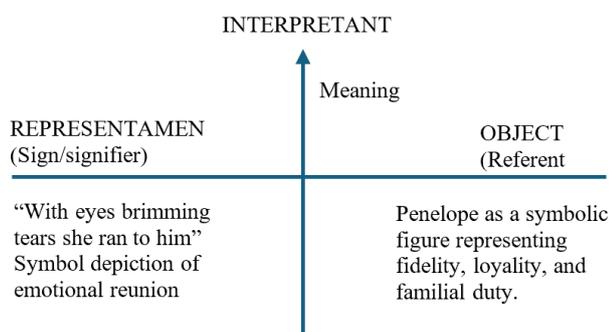


Fig. 12. Peircean triadic sign model of Loyalty.

Figure 12 presents the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of Penelope's action "*With eyes brimming tears she ran to him*" in *The Odyssey*. The representamen is the representation of Penelope embracing to cry; this has become a symbol that stands for unconditional love and loyalty to one's family. The sign itself refers to Penelope's constancy or – as Vlastos would probably have preferred it – her "ethico-moral virtues" of the Homeric epic world. It is her loyalty that grounds the narrative and reminds viewers of the significance of family and societal responsibilities, showing that heroism is not just about martial or intellectual superiority, but also about sturdy virtues. The interpretant is formed in the audience's apprehension of the emotional and moral fidelity that accompanies, for example, a Homeric heroic ideal. Penelope's fidelity is a prime example of the extent to which personal virtues exist to affirm Epic society as well as ethical norms, and the reunion of her with Odysseus can then be seen as an idealized version of both family structure and social stability. This semiotic reading highlights that Greek heroism is not just a matter of solitary achievements, but also of moral and social commitment.

Data 13

Achilles and Patroclus (Friendship and Loyalty)

"Achilles wept, remembering his dear comrade, nor did sleep that conquereth all take hold on him, but he kept turning him to this side and to that, yearning for Patroklos' manhood and excellent valour, and all the toils he achieved with him and the woes he bare, cleaving the battles of men and the grievous waves." (Iliad of the Homer, 494)

Sign: Achilles' grief for Patroclus signifies the importance of comradeship and loyalty as vital aspects of heroism, symbolizing the emotional depth that lies at the heart of the warrior's code.

Achilles perceived as a hero whose emotional depth and loyalty to comrades highlight the ethical and relational dimensions of Greek heroism, emphasizing grief as a mark of moral and cultural value.

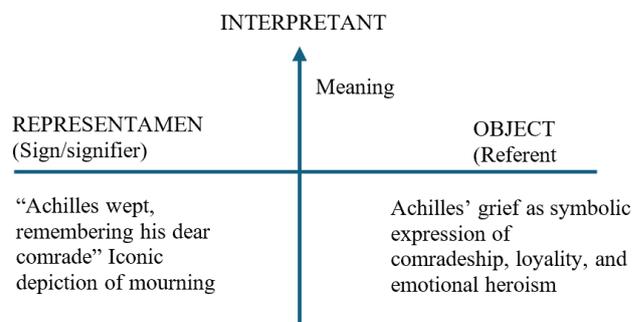


Fig. 13. Peircean triadic sign model of friendship and loyalty.

Figure 13 presents the Peircean triadic

semiotic structure of Achilles' mourning for Patroclus "*Achilles wept, remembering his dear comrade*" in *The Iliad*. The representamen is the visual, story-driven manifestation of mourning and operates primarily as an indexical sign of emotion. The referent of the sign is Achilles' friendship and comradeship, which are ethical and relational qualities of Greek heroism. Sleep is an expression of personal loss, but also the ethical value of ties between fighters; it contributes to a cultural celebration, characteristic of the heroic code, in which loyalty and friendship are valued. The interpretant is the audience realizing that heroism is a mix of martial ability, emotional depth, and moral character. Achilles' grief shows a striking closeness that exists between ethics and relationships (like loyalty, friendship, and mourning) to the heroic world in which they are the motivation for further action, while on the other hand, confirming a humanized understanding of Greek epic heroes.

Data 14

Odysseus and Telemachus:

"behold Telemachos' dear father mingling with the champions of the Trojans, the tamers of horses." (Iliad of the Homer, 75)

Symbol: The reunion of father and son highlights generational loyalty and the continuity of the family legacy, reinforcing the symbol of familial unity in heroic narratives.

Odysseus and Telemachus prevailed as symbols of familial continuity and integrational loyalty, emphasizing the ethical and social dimensions of heroism within the greek epic traditions

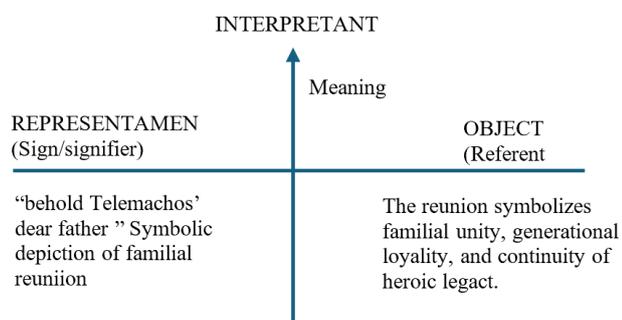


Figure 14. Peircean triadic sign model of father and son

Figure 14 illustrates the Peircean triadic semiotic structure of Odysseus' statement "*Telemachos' dear father*" in *The Odyssey*. The representamen is the symbol as a moral and physical sign of likeness in ancestry between father and son, the symbolic correlate of filiation continuity. Sign's referent is the relational and ethical connection between Odysseus and Telemachus, which demonstrates that heroism in Homeric epics encompasses not only physical courage and reason but also the continuation of

family traditions and moral responsibility. The interpretant lies in the audience's apprehension that ethical heroism entails saving family heritage, promoting loyalty, and standing up for continuity to perpetuate itself beyond generations. The reunion itself is a reminder that family loyalties are central to any hero's identity and system of ethics; the scene expresses the human "values" implicit in Greek epic and brings the heroic back into a social/ethical frame.

IV. DISCUSSION

By examining the symbols and motifs present in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, we can gain a better understanding of how the concept of heroism is complicated, as well as get an insight into what it means to be heroic within Greek culture, such as pertaining to family ties, loyalty among comrades, or moral obligation. The model of Achilles mourning his friend, which Odysseus restrains and emotes madly, as well as the allegorical revisitation of Penelope's and Telemachus' fidelity, illustrates how Greco-Roman epic depicts heroism not merely as a measure of physical prowess but also as an emotional breadth and ethical logic. These emotional factors of heroism are key to the dual nature of Greek values, which encompass individual honor alongside duty towards others, and how these themes are reflected in the relationships between heroes and their kin or companions (Adkins 1982, Long 1970).

By contrast to the traditional conceptualization of Greek heroism in relation to theory as shared among Greek warriors, most, if not all, heroes are considered human whose behavior and decisions are deeply grounded in moral/ethical codes (Ingalls & Nagy, 1981; Nagy, 2005; Pache, 2009). Honor, loyalty, and family are the core values of the hero's self-definition, and it mirrors the social contract in ancient Greek society (Kinsella et al., 2015; Nagy, 2005; Staats et al., 2009). The contract stipulated that a hero should not only be skilled in fighting but also be faithful to their comrades and kin. Examples of the two kinds of heroism can be found in, for example, Achilles' emotional sacrifice for Patroclus and Odysseus' moral dilemma over his men's desires.

In addition, the discussion reveals the moral and affective aspects of heroism that have been neglected in previous interpretations, which have emphasized athletic dexterity (as Evzonas

2018; Finkelberg 1995). If the *Iliad* sings of “hot-blooded” and impulsive heroism, the *Odyssey* celebrates a controlled and domesticated one, much attached to hearth and home (Giunchi 2023). This difference is heard in the opposing depictions of femininity presented in each work, since while the *Iliad* exhibits Helen’s ruinous beauty, the *Odyssey* praises Penelope’s loyal housewifery (Beardsley 2021; Lesser 2019). The findings of the present study further serve to clarify that affective depth in epic is neither old news under a tattered epistemological theory nor a “new” (literary) heroism; rather, such dimensionality is from time immemorial an integral expression form for heroes in the genre (Emily, 2024; Lesser, 2018, 2019). The sacrifices of attractiveness, vulnerability, and sheer humanity made by such characters as Achilles, Odysseus, and Penelope are just as vital to their heroism as is their martial prowess.

The implications of these conclusions were significant when interpreting Greek epic poetry as a moral and emotional narrative, rather than merely one of physical warfare. These observations make clear that Greek heroism, as portrayed in *The Iliad and The Odyssey*, should not only be viewed as a pursuit for glory through combat but also a moral challenge through loyalty–allies’ fidelity and personal sacrifice. This more inclusive interpretation challenges the simplistic views of Greek heroism, in which epicheroes rely solely on physical strength and bravery, instead highlighting moral accountability, emotional fidelity, and family coherence as key determinants of heroes’ actions and identities. What such an understanding might provide for modern readers is a more nuanced and ultimately deeper idea of what it means to be a hero, one that takes account of personal and ethical ambivalence.

Nevertheless, the weaknesses of these studies are that they centralize *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey* on their protagonist, but do not take into consideration the many other characters whose quadrasystematic actions also impact themes with hero elements. Furthermore, although ideological armature (the connection between ideas and emotions) is a theme in the blog post version of Heroism/post’s argument and it in fact elaborates on this in a way that would cast some light on *iminika* – “hero” as praise-deserving victim, there is relatively little interest placed upon ways of seeing how values such as those which construct heroism pass from one generation

to another via structural forms like the Promethean myth or valorization of courage/logos. Second, the reading is primarily a literary interpretation and does not consider newer methodologies that may incorporate sociocultural or psychological perspectives on the text. Tractinsky 82. Other topics that could be pursued by future research include the incorporation of other points of view, which might help expand our thinking about how heroism in ancient Greek literature resonates meaningfully with projects and practitioners today.

V. CONCLUSION

This study undertakes a comprehensive semiotic analysis, guided by Peirce’s theory, to examine the linguistic and artistic dimensions through which Homer constructs heroism in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The primary objective was to move beyond simplistic interpretations of heroic identity, exploring how linguistic choices shape contrasting portrayals of Achilles and Odysseus, particularly in terms of their ethical dimensions. Through a qualitative descriptive approach and meticulous content analysis of key passages, the results show six interconnected categories of heroism: Heroic Strength and Physicality, Divine Influence and Fate, The Heroic Journey and Struggle, Heroism and Sacrifice, Moral and Ethical Dimensions, and Family and Loyalty. The findings unequivocally demonstrate that Homeric heroism is a rich, multifaceted concept far transcending mere martial prowess. Achilles, characterized by epithets such as “swift-footed” and “great-hearted,” embodies a heroism deeply rooted in physical prowess and profound emotional intensity, often intertwined with divine decree and a tragic fate. In contrast, Odysseus, frequently hailed as “wily,” showcases a heroism defined by intellectual acumen, strategic cunning, resilience, and a profound sense of moral responsibility. The semiotic analysis revealed how specific linguistic elements—from epithets and dialogue to narrative structures—function as signs to convey not only external actions but also internal moral conflicts, emotional sacrifices, and the critical role of familial loyalty. These insights significantly contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Greek heroism, suggesting it is an internal journey of moral growth, personal sacrifice, and enduring loyalty, rather than solely a quest for battlefield glory. The study highlights the intricate interplay between human

agency and divine will, the ethical complexities inherent in leadership, and the profound impact of emotional and familial bonds on the formation of heroic identity. By highlighting the moral responsibility, emotional resilience, and family unity woven into the fabric of Homeric narratives, this research offers a more profound and relatable perspective on heroism for contemporary readers, affirming the timeless relevance of Homer's epics in shaping our understanding of human excellence and ethical conduct.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Informed consent was granted from all respondents, and their identities had been on the private and confidential files. This study fully complies with the ethical standards and publication guidelines of Jurnal Arbitrer

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Zholaman Taubaevish Koblanov, data analysis and interpretation, wrote article and proofread the draft, formulate discussion, handled publication process.

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The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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