Responses

Grading:

I replaced names with a two-letter code (A or B followed by another letter) so that I could read the essays anonymously. I grouped essays by levels of success and cross-read those groups to check that the rankings were consistent.

Comments on the assignment:

Writers found all manner of things to focus on: Night, crying, hospitality, the return of princes from the dead (Hector, Odysseus), and the exchange of bodies (Hector, Penelope). Here are four interesting and quite different responses:

Essay #1: **Substitution**

I Am That I Am: The Nature of Identity in the Iliad and the Odyssey

The last book of the *Iliad*, and the penultimate book of the *Odyssey*, both deal with the issue of substitution; specifically, of accepting a substitute for a lost loved one. Priam and Achilles become substitutes for each others' absent father and dead son. In contrast, Odysseus's journey is fraught with instances of him refusing to take a substitute for Penelope, and in the end Penelope makes the ultimate verification that Odysseus is *not* one of the many substitutes that she has been offered over the years. In their contrasting depictions of substitution, the endings of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* offer insights into each epic's depiction of identity in general.

Questions of identity are in the foreground throughout much of the *Iliad*; one need only try to unravel the symbolism and consequences of Patroclus' donning Achilles' armor to see how this is so. In the interaction between Achilles and Priam, however, they are particularly poignant. Achilles has already demonstrated his ability to discriminate between the messenger and the message, as when he hosted Agamemnon's heralds. In the final chapter, he takes that ability a step further: Priam entreating Achilles in the name of his father (*Il.* 24.570) and Achilles not only accepting that plea but weeping for his absent father (*Il*. 24.598) make it clear that Achilles is responding to Priam in his role as father (of Hector) rather than as enemy commander (king of Troy). Priam, too, in clinging to and weeping with Achilles, treats him as a temporary substitute for the son he has lost.

Yet in doing so, neither Achilles nor Priam forfeits or jeopardizes any part of his identity. Achilles is still the son of Peleus, as he recounts his sorrow to Priam; in fact, he is *more so* Peleus's son than ever before, since now he identifies himself with is mortal father, rather than with his divine mother as he did at the height of his *aristeia*. Similarly, although the

audience knows well Priam's love for Hector, it is in this chapter's scene of his rage at his surviving sons that this preference is made most obvious. This suggest that in the Iliad, substitution is acceptable because identity is stable: Achilles and Priam are in no danger of losing sight – or allowing others to lose sight – of who they are, and so they can temporarily use each other as substitutes in order to alleviate their shared grief.

Identity is also in the foreground of the *Odyssey*, albeit in a very different way. The most explicit example is, of course, Odysseus' deception of the Cyclops, when he makes what *seems* to be a stupid mistake by his name after telling the creature his name is "Nobody." This action results in a years-long curse and the deaths of all his men, yet Odysseus is never explicitly condemned or blamed for it; clearly, there is a larger narrative at work, one in which the control of identity by strategic concealment and revelation is more important than Odysseus' desire to keep his men safe.

This larger narrative is highlighted in a question that runs throughout the *Odysse*y: why, when faced with so many appealing alternatives, does Odysseus continually strive to return to Penelope? He spends a year with Circe as his lover, *eight* years with Calypso, and is offered an Eden of a kingdom by Nausicaa's father, yet in each case he ultimately rejects the substitute and renews his quest to return to Ithaca and Penelope. The cases of Circe and Nausicaa are particularly telling, as the poet actually reveals how Odysseus meets them. In both cases, Odysseus's identity is initially a secret. He does not reveal himself to Circe, but rather is found out by her (*Od.* 10.330); similarly, he declines tell Nausicaa and her parents his name multiple times, until his physical prowess and Demodocus's songs of Troy set the stage for a dramatic revelation.

These two meetings are key because both share key elements of Odysseus's return to Ithaca. As with Nausicaa, he conceals his identity multiple times, and takes the deception one step further by actively lying about his origins rather than merely concealing information. As with Circe, his identity is (against his will) discovered by a woman, Eurykleia. However, unlike with Circe and Nausicaa, discovery and revelation are not sufficient for Penelope. She herself sees a sign – the stringing and shooting of the great bow – that the stranger in her hall is Odysseus, she hears from Eurykleia how the old woman discovered Odysseus's identity, and Odysseus dramatically reveals himself to her *with the help of a goddess* (*Od.* 23.156-163), and Penelope's response is to *trick him*, forcing him to either reveal himself as a fraud or offer factual proof of his identity.

This is the only time in the *Odyssey* that Odysseus is outright asked to prove who he is. Almost everyone else takes his tales, true or untrue, at face value, and those who suspect, like Queen Arete, quickly have their doubts put off by his glib tongue. Even Telemachus, when he doubts Odysseus's revelation (as Athena has been teaching him to do), is quelled not by any factual proof Odysseus offers, but rather by Odysseus assuming the authority of a father and demanding obedience as such.

Moreover, the particular proof that Odysseus gives Penelope is itself telling: it's information about his *marriage bed*. The bed's state serves, in one sense, as a symbol of Odysseus's marriage to Penelope. At the end of his speech, he retorts that he no longer knows whether the bed is still rooted to the ground – in other words, whether Penelope has truly been faithful. At the same time, it also acts as an anchor for Odysseus's own identity. He has spent ten years wandering on the sea, and on his return to Ithaca tells Eumaeus a story that implies he may leave yet again. However, his bed, his marriage, his *relationship with Penelope*, is unchangeable. She is, in a symbolic sense, where his identity truly resides. He cannot take a substitute for her because to do so would be to forfeit his relationship with Penelope and thereby to stop being *Odysseus*, and this refusal of substitution climaxes and is explained in their interaction at the end of the *Odyssey*'s penultimate chapter.

Ultimately, then, the last chapter of the *Iliad* and the penultimate chapter of the *Odyssey* serve to recap each epic's differing portrayal of identity. In the Iliad, substitution is acceptable because identity is stable: Achilles can embrace Priam as a father figure while remaining the legendary son of Peleus and Thetis, and Priam can embrace Achilles as a substitute for Hector while remaining Hector's loving father and king of the Trojans. In the *Odyssey*, however Odysseus's marriage to Penelope is the one sphere in which his clever deceptions are turned back against him, where after years of strategically concealing his identity, he is finally required to *prove* it. Substitution is unacceptable because identity is unstable: whatever other deceptions he makes about his identity, whatever detours he makes along the way, Odysseus cannot accept a substitute for Penelope because his marriage to her constitutes an integral part of his identity. Thus, in these ending chapters, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* each use the question of substitution – accepting it in one case, and revealing why it is unacceptable in the other – to illuminate and reprise their own depiction of the nature of identity.

Essay #2: **Distrust**

Distrust as a Means of Extending Plot

The Iliad and *The Odyssey* do not end in the battlefield, but at home. The adrenaline cooled, the great war heroes can set their affairs in order and the poet can neatly tie up the plot. Unfortunately, tidy, rational conclusions cannot captivate an audience quite like struggle and triumph. (Credits roll when the game show contestant is dancing in confetti, not when she is dutifully filling out the tax forms required to claim her winnings.) While Odysseus and Penelope's pillow talk at the end of *Odyssey* 23 is sweet, it stands as a considerable drop in drama from the preceding bloodbath. To reconcile the conflicting needs for a resolute ending and an interested audience, the poet utilizes distrust in Hector's and Odysseus' families: a handy character trait to extend the storyline and maintain tension.

Both epics focus on a single prime actor, whether Achilles or Odysseus. The poet will shift perspectives to outline the meetings of the gods, families, and other peripheral characters,

but the narrative focus remains on the main player. Hector is developed to provide Achilles a worthy foe to vanquish—his family introduced to stir more sympathy for his death, another testament to Achilles' power. Penelope's wiles are detailed to incite a greater desire for Odysseus' homecoming. All roads lead back to the hero. Yet *Iliad* 24 and *Odyssey* 23 noticeably focus on King Priam and Penelope, respectively, immediately after the two heroes have shown the most raw power. Neither Achilles or Odysseus is willing to sacrifice the battlefield—Achilles restlessly labors to harm Hector even past death and Odysseus cannot give up his filthy, bloodstained garments. Audiences would be waiting for the resolution of Hector's death and Odysseus' return to Penelope's arms, but the poet cannot hurry the ending by weakening his heroes. Not even Odysseus will lower his spear, climb the stairs, and reclaim his wife; he remains coolly downstairs. Priam and Penelope are entreated to approach Achilles and Odysseus, to slowly rise to their level rather than let the warriors lower their guard and undermine their climactic characterization.

Priam and Penelope are both unnecessarily hesitant to do what is needed. Their distrust of received news slows the action considerably. Messages are not simply sent, but told and retold, pondered and puzzled over. To compel Priam out of Troy, Zeus commands a messenger to summon Thetis to persuade Achilles to give up Hector's body to Priam, but only after Zeus sends the same messenger to Priam who will consult his wife and beg confidence of Zeus, then travel to meet Hermes who will guide him to successfully retrieve Hector's body. A headache to recount and an over 500 line extension of the poem (*Il.* 24, 26-560); the poet makes it quite clear that Priam lacks the agency and confidence to meet Achilles in his post-battle glory alone. Achilles is still caught up in rage over Patroclus' death. He is all action and anger: tossing and turning, pacing, wandering, and trying his hardest to mutilate Hector's corpse. There would be no realistic possibility that Priam could match Achilles in this state. The poet must stretch the story in other areas to allow Achilles time to cool. Priam provides that necessary hesitation.

Priam is granted a convoluted chain of aid that he doubts, despite its divine components. This pulls more characters into the narrative, a bit of a full cast curtain call, again helping to slow the narration and giving Achilles a chance to calm himself. Priam's journey is a welcome resolution to Hector's story, hearteningly human, but his start is delayed by his distrust in the gods' goodwill. Despite receiving a directive from Zeus, Priam dawdles. (Notably Achilles, the much stronger character, is resolute when Thetis gives him Zeus's complementary command.) The king readies his wagons, but then turns to Hecuba, his wife, with second thoughts. He begs her for her input—a momentarily touching display of partnership in marriage—and then immediately dismisses her views to follow his instincts. This empty exchange reveals Priam's insecurity in following Zeus's commands; Priam himself represents his emotional, honor-bound inclinations and Hecuba stands in for rational measured thought. Hecuba bemoans the realistic danger of facing Achilles, cursing her husband's stubborn "heart of iron" (*Il.* 24, 243). Priam, despite the time-sensitivity of dead flesh (he does not know at this point that Apollo has preserved Hector's body), sorts through his final affairs: namely taking the time to scold his non-heroic children. Finally, after all of the foot dragging, Hecuba persuades him to seek a physical symbol of Zeus's protection, a fairly bold requirement

of a deity. Only in the face of absolute proof does Hecuba yield and, with her, Priam's lingering distrust.

In the case of the *Odyssey*'s mistrustful woman, Penelope's disbelief in her husband's return begins credibly. Eurykleia approaches her bedside laughing and stumbling (*Od.* 23, 1-5). Penelope assumes the nurse is slightly mad or otherwise cruel to toy with her emotions. (After all, the old woman did just witness the house strewn with dead bodies, only to begin an extended bout of giggling.) She blames the gods for her nurse's apparent insanity, an ironic mistrust considering Athena's recent involvement in Odysseus' battles and Penelope's own restful sleep. Still, the gods did leave Penelope and husband unprotected for nearly a decade. Her mistrust may be a product of feelings of betrayal, an assumption that the gods like her best unhappy. Regardless of her mistaken attribution, Penelope's distrust seems natural; twenty years of waiting can certainly harden woman's heart, and she would naturally take great offense to attempts to take advantage of her. However, as Eurykleia elaborates, her mistress's reactions become more schizophrenic.

Like Priam, she must reconcile emotional responses with reasoned arguments. Penelope has to grapple with a desperate, visceral desire for her husband's homecoming in opposition to her rational understanding of the odds stacked strongly against him. She giddily listens as Eurykleia relays what she has witnessed (in fact, a remarkably non-hyperbolic account of the day's hyperbole-worthy events), then proclaims them utterly unreasonable, again crediting immortals for their hand in the improbable. In the scheme of the narration, is it as if the story has been thrust back 60 lines, a return to Penelope's initial distrust. Only brief mentions allude to the gradual warming of Penelope's heart; it ponders and wonders, acting as the mind should. Narratively, this helps slow the pace to a near crawl.

Penelope is constantly swayed by details of her husband's arrival, but painfully slowly convinced that he is standing in the same building as she. Her heart is filled with joy, her knees buckle with excitement, and all signs point to recognition, but she still treats Odysseus as a stranger. As *Exodus*'s Pharaoh's heart was hardened to keep the Jews in Egypt for more biblical displays of God's power, the *Iliad*'s Penelope stands aloof from her husband, filled with distrust in order to fulfill the poet's goal of a smooth dénouement. Even Odysseus remarks on her immortally stubborn judgment, her "heart of iron"—the same characterization Hecuba notes of Priam (*Od.* 23, 172). Yet, when Penelope stands and watches Odysseus, ostensibly a stranger, order her son and servants around without uttering a word in protest, she must realize that her husband stands before her. Her mistrust now is feigned, a trick to force Odysseus to prove he has not forgotten their life together. The intimate details of the bed secure Odysseus' truthfulness and remind the audience that Odysseus left other beautiful, powerful females to return to the memory of their shared bed. Penelope provided Odysseus's final challenge and their reunion, its resolution, is fittingly satisfying.

The Iliad and *The Odyssey* build to huge violent climaxes, posing a problem for a typically slow, winding conclusion. To protect against undue deflation of the heroes—truly, any

narration past the final battles will show a lesser form of the two god-like men—the poet shifts narrative focus to secondary characters. Priam and Penelope each go through their own struggles, emotional instead of physical, to rise to the occasion and resolve their missing piece of the plot. Both Achilles and Odysseus foresee the end of their stories, but must wait for their counterparts to fulfill them, literally waiting in one place. Priam and Penelope do not face any true opponent (even Achilles is set to help Priam), so they find their counter within their own self-doubt. Their emotional struggles extend the plot and allow the heroes to cool themselves from battle, neatly resolving the major plot arcs.

Essay #3: Hospitality

Good Manners

The Odyssey and *The Iliad* both build toward a moment of peace. In *The Iliad,* that moment comes when Achilles meets with Priam, and his rage finally comes to an end. In *The Odyssey,* the peace arises when Odysseus finally presents himself (as himself) to Penelope. This peace is temporary, however. The Achaeans will resume fighting the Trojans, and Odysseus will have to fight the relatives of the suitors. In both cases, this peace is brought on by unique dynamics of hospitality.

Hospitality is a prevalent theme throughout *The Odyssey.* Odysseus is a constant guest. His own livelihood (and that of his men) is often in the hands of his host, and therefore never his own. The offenses of his hosts stretch from having chatty women in the court to eating his companions two at a time. Odysseus himself is wont to break social codes, such as when he eats Polyphemos' food before he returns. Until his return to Ithaca, he is never in the host position and therefore never fully in control of his journey.

Penelope is the constant host. When Odysseus is finally home, he must be accepted by the hostess, Penelope. Although the Achaean kings are powerful, they have left their kingdoms in the hands of guileful and ambitious wives. The women of *The Odyssey* are not the wispy pawns of *The Iliad.* Agamemnon's fate is referred to often throughout the epic. That he was killed as a guest at a feast given by Klytaimestra's new lover is telling. Agamemnon was no longer the ruler of his kingdom. Odysseus officially left Penelope in charge of his household (18: 266). She now has to return this power to Odysseus. The situation seems similar to that of American women during World War II. When the men went to war, women assumed their responsibilities, causing friction upon the men's' return. After being gone for so long, the warriors are guests in their own lands, strangers to their own wives. Odysseus does not even recognize Ithaca when he finally arrives on its shores. In order to become ruler once again, he must recognize his home and be recognized by it. Penelope's recognition of Odysseus permits him to assume his former role as king rather than guest.

Hospitality does not play the central role in *The Iliad,* but it is important to pay attention to the times when hospitality does come up. The Trojan War began with a very bad guest (Paris taking Menelaus' wife). It is worth questioning, since the epic is driven by the trafficking of women, whether it is the insult to Menelaus that fuels the war, or the quest to recover Helen. It isn't dwelled upon in *The Iliad,* but it seems to have been accepted that during the sack of Troy, Menelaus intended to kill Helen, but Aphrodite intervened, and he instead took her as his wife. This piece of the story seems to confirm that the war was not started because of a woman, but instead dishonor to a host.

Stretching the theme farther with regard to *The Iliad*, war can be seen as a kind of host-guest relationship. The Achaeans, being foreigners, are guests of sorts to the Trojans. Clearly, neither side plays its role well. This is, of course, a *stretch,* but it is not so different from the battle between Odysseus and the suitors in *The Odyssey.* It is objectionable that Odysseus kills guests in his home, but the guests themselves were the first to take advantage of Penelope's hospitality.

Agamemnon is careful never to be Achilles' guest. He sends Talthybius and Eurybates to collect Briseis. Instead of going himself to apologize to Achilles, he sends Ajax, Odysseus, and Phoenix. The reason for this may extend beyond Agamemnon's fear of Achilles. He may be trying to avoid the respect and graciousness that one must display in a guest-host relationship. Although guests are to be treated well by their hosts, the host plays the dominant role, for it is his food that is eaten and his wealth that is on display. The honor goes to the host. There is no telling whether or not the quarrel could have been resolved at the outset if Agamemnon had met with Achilles face-to-face, as hospitality often has the power to bind men.

Perhaps the greatest example of this fact is the interaction between Diomedes and Glaucus on the battlefield (6:169-282). The hospitality of Diomedes' grandfather toward Glaucus' causes them to not only spare each other's life, but agree to host each other after the war. This moment, when Diomedes and Glaucus make a friendship pact is strikingly similar to the reconciliation between Priam and Achilles. Neither Diomedes nor Glaucus is made safer by the pact, except from each other. But, as in the meeting between Priam and Achilles, it is a small act of civility, of humanness, amidst the chaos of war, and its existence is its triumph. The Bard throws in a suspicious note that Glaucus was misled when he traded armor with Diomedes, but we do not know if Diomedes' intent was malicious. All the same, Diomedes would have been able to keep his own armor in addition to Glaucus' if he had only killed Glaucus.

It is, in fact, hospitality that resolves the problem of Hektor's body. The epic appropriately ends with an instance of good, productive hospitality. Achilles' manners have certainly not improved since his last appearance as a host; he threatens his guest, who merely asks to see his son's body. On the whole, however, the encounter is harmonious, and Achilles even promises to hold the Argives back for as long as is necessary for the Trojans to mourn.

Bathing plays a role in both scenes and frequently throughout *The Odyssey.* Earlier in *The Iliad,* while Achilles is slaughtering Hektor, Andromache is drawing his bath. The wife's simple assumption that her husband will come home is tragically domestic in contrast to reality. Hektor is finally bathed in Achilles' care in order to avoid a confrontation with Priam (which would surely lead to Priam's death). Not only does the scene bring closure to Andromache's foiled plan, but it seems to resemble the hospitality of a saner, more civilized world. Odysseus is often bathed on his journeys (by Helen, Kalypso, Nausikaa's attendents, Circe, and Eurykleia). Therefore the bathing of Hektor may be some form of hospitality, and therefore reconciliation, between Hektor and Achilles. After Hektor's body has been washed, Achilles and Priam are able to eat. In *The Odyssey,* Penelope refuses to acknowledge her husband until he has bathed. He is, of course, covered in the blood of her guests, but such guests could hardly have meant much to Penelope in comparison to the return of her husband. It may be that Odysseus, as a guest, has disrespected her, the host, the benefactor in the matter, in presenting himself in an unkempt state. In any case, before grief can end, someone must be bathed.

The termination of mourning is the outcome of both encounters. Achilles' dominant role as host over Priam gives him control, which brings him peace. He finally has the capability to put an end to his grieving and that of his guest (24:610). Priam is able to mourn the loss of his son (as opposed to mourning because he is unable to mourn for his son). While Achilles and Priam are each able to accept the loss of someone, Penelope and her husband are able to accept Odysseus' return. Penelope can stop mourning the loss of Odysseus, and Odysseus can stop mourning the loss of his home. Although each character will have to face greater challenges at dawn, their visits provide them with a few moments of companionship, a few moments of peace.

Essay #4: **Self-abnegation and the restoration of family**

Restoring the Family by Relinquishing Power

In the resolution chapters in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, we see characters acting incongruously with their kingly statuses, jeopardizing their own personal well being for the sake of restoring their families, and revealing a vulnerability that is unusual to their disposition. We see the old King Priam supplicating himself to his enemy Achilles in order to redeem the corpse of Hector, as well as Ithaca's renowned Odysseus temporarily humbling himself to rebuild his marriage to Penelope and regain his family honor. The reconciliation between each of these two parties requires the creation of a trusting relationship in order to restore the family structures that have been devastated by war and extended absence. It is only by relinquishing their powers that Odysseus and Priam can create the trust necessary to restore their families.

In each situation of reconciliation, there is an obvious character in a power position and another without power. At the end of the Iliad, Achilles is, without a doubt, that powerful figure. His possession of Hector's corpse gives him god-like power over Priam. Achilles

appears Hades-like as he lords over Hector's dead body, desecrating the corpse as he drags it by chariot—all of this within his "imposing lodge." Priam's nocturnal journey illustrates this underworld image, as he encounters Hermes, the conductor of the spirits to the Hades, and the Trojan women mourn, "as if he went to his death" (24.388). It is clear that Priam, although ruler of the opposing forces, is far below this god-like warrior and must supplicate himself to his awesome power if he wishes to redeem his son and restore honor to his family.

Although the distinction of power is less extreme in *The Odyssey*, Odysseus's absence has led to an inversion of the normal household power structure; Penelope is now the ruler of the royal domain. Although she is a woman, Odysseus (as beggar) compares Penelope's *kleos* to that of a great king (18.107). Yes, Telemachus, his son, has begun to exhibit his leadership, however, it is clear that for the last twenty years Penelope has been the dominion in Ithaca. Her influence manifests itself on a more a sexual level, as Penelope has supreme power over which man gets to come to her bedroom, and by extension take the throne. For the past four years, she has been a master over a flock of suitors, and exhibits a shrewd power to influence their behavior (i.e. to give her gifts). As a result of her status, Odysseus' reclamation of his throne is pivotally dependent on her acknowledging his claim to her bedroom. Although the balance of power in favor of Penelope might seem unusual given our historical understanding of the Greek female role, their reconciliation suggests that the balance of power between wife and husband should to some extent be equal, honoring the marriage.

Reconciliation in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* is built on the notion that Priam and Odysseus must yield power to build a trusting relationship. The audience sees from Priam's perspective as he comes into Achilles' domain alone and unprotected with a "priceless ransom." When Priam literally "clasps the knees, and kissed his hands" of Achilles, he shows that he is below him (24.560). This is not an ordinary man bowing down to Achilles, but rather the ruler of an entire kingdom, a well-respected and powerful man on his own account. Throughout the epic, Priam has been depicted as a stoic and powerful leader. However, Priam must submit to the man who slaughtered hundreds of Trojans if he wishes to gain back Hector's corpse. He must relinquish himself in order to redeem his family honor.

Odysseus must also act against his own cunning and sly nature and open himself up to Penelope in order to reconcile his marriage. Throughout the epic, Odysseus has been deceptive and watchful—rarely revealing his true identity for self-protection. He even approaches his own house deceptively cloaked as a beggar. However, after Odysseus executes his plan, kills all of the suitors, and reveals his identity, Penelope still decisively is in control of their relationship. She perceives his deceptive armor, and remains hesitantly distanced. Ironically, it is her cunning that enables her to tactfully disarm him by lying about their marriage bed (24.174-180). When Odysseus finally admits that she has "hurt my [his] heart deeply," showing his vulnerability, the dedication he has to the marriage-bed, and the deep meaning it has for him, she finally relents. This is significant, because for the marriage to work, Odysseus can no longer be the tough-skinned warrior of the journey, but must be an open and trusting partner in their relationship.

By relinquishing themselves, Priam and Odysseus try to restore the stability of their families broken by Hector's death and Odysseus' absence. The fall of the great defender of Troy has brought delirious grief upon the Trojan people (Priam's family). The Trojan's have lost a father, brother, and son. In his irascible grief, Priam goes as far as to declare that he has no worthy sons left (24.307). The father and family are shamed by Achilles' treatment of Hector's corpse. Without honorable funeral rites for the fallen hero, the family is humiliated and broken. Therefore, Priam's reconciliation with Achilles represents a restoration of the family on many levels. On one level, he retrieves the corpse, but on a deeper level it is quite significant that he does so by appealing to the psychology of the father-son relationship. He implores Achilles to "remember your [his] own father" when looking upon the old king (24.570). In remembering his own father Peleus, whom he imagines to be in grief over the impending doom of his hero son, Achilles feels guilty over the pain he has caused and takes pity on Priam. In one of the strange twists of the epic, these two enemies grieve together as if they were father and son. The trust in their relationship is cemented when Achilles extends an overnight welcome to the old king signifying the good faith that he would not kill Priam. The creation of this trusting father-son like relationship, as well as the redemption of Hector's body, marks the restoration of the family.

For Odysseus, the restoration of the family is the entire objective of his journey—in which he passes on immortality, romance, and sexual pleasures—for the sake of returning home to his wife and child. However, when he finally returns, the house is no longer his but Penelope's. Even after he kills the suitors, it is not as simple as strolling back into the house and reclaiming his throne. Initially, their marital relationship seems strained and awkward when he approaches her in bloody armor. It is clear that he must play under Penelope's rules, and she is still hesitant to trust him as a husband after he has been gone for twenty years, until he shows his vulnerability and his respect for the marriage bed. After this, she breaks down in tears and embraces Odysseus (23.205). Although they come together in the end to restore the family unit, the inverted balance of power (and the fact that they haven't seen each other for 20 years) causes their reconciliation to be slightly miscued. The irony here is that Priam and Achilles (as enemies) play the father-son roles much smoother than Odysseus and Penelope (who have real familial ties) play husband and wife.

In both cases, fulfilling these roles and restoring the family can only occur after Priam and Odysseus relinquish their own power for the purpose of forming trusting relationships. By forfeiting their own power and acknowledging the power of Achilles and Penelope, the two kings demonstrate their faith to building a trusting relationship. Once this happens, the family can be restored (albeit only for a short time for the doomed Trojans). The heroic kings thus find redemption through empathy and reconciliation through the family bond.