

THE SHIELD, THE POEM, AND THE POET: MATERIAL,
THEMATIC, AND CREATIVE RESONANCE IN THE EKPHRASIS
OF ACHILLES' SHIELD IN BOOK 18 OF THE *ILIAD*

by

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Ekphrasis of Achilles' Shield in Book 18 of the *Iliad*

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The ekphrasis of Achilles' Shield has been a topic of scholarly interest for millennia due to its unusually lengthy description and departure from the formulaic structure of ancient epic poetry. Crafted by Hephaestus and described by Homer, the Shield occupies a unique position, unable to be concretely classified as narration or description. The distance between the immortal craftsman and mortal poet leaves the Shield's physical appearance ambiguous; the scenes engraved on the face are simultaneously characterized as static visual art features and dynamic vignettes. The veiled materiality of the object and the passage's ekphrastic format curate an environment for innumerable metaphorical and thematic interpretations. The cosmic center and oceanic border surrounding the anthropocentric vignettes enclose the scenes within a self-sufficient universe, creating a microcosm of the *Iliad's* central plot and themes. Homer's presence during the fabrication of the Shield complicates the boundaries between the narrative and its author, as the poet aligns himself with the divine craftsman. Embedding a microcosm of the poem within itself creates a doubling effect that, along with depictions of oral poetry on the object, shifts creative authority away from Hephaestus and labels Homer the Shield's creator.

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Introduction: Background on the *Iliad*

The *Iliad* is an epic poem of 15, 693 lines composed in the eighth century BCE.¹ The epic, attributed to the poet Homer, recounts the story of the mythical Trojan War. The curiosity surrounding Homer's identity started in Classical Greece, as Homeric literature was a large part of their political, educational, and social lives. Originally, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were thought to have been written by a single poet, called Homer, whose ancestry, place of origin, and time of life were highly debated. In the 19th and 20th centuries, a new theory was developed among Homerists that accredited the two epic poems to multiple authors instead of one genius of a man.² Scholars proposed that over the span of hundreds of years, differing versions of the same poem were layered over each other and stitched together to create one mega epic.³

Thus began the double-sided argument dubbed The Homeric Question. Scholars were content to duke it out using anecdotal and artifactual material from before, during, and after Homer's supposed period of authorship to piece together the story behind the story. The tension between Homeric schools of thought continued until 1930 when scholar Milman Parry published his research on oral-formulaic poetry. Through the uses of textual analysis, comparative anthropology, and fieldwork, Parry came to the conclusion that Homeric literature did not start out as a written text but was instead a piece of poetry composed and recited orally by a non-literate singer.⁴ This publication had immense repercussions throughout the entire field because it uprooted not only centuries of supposed knowledge about Homer's identity but also forced

¹ An epic poem is an incredibly large genre with loose specifications. Generally, it's taken to mean a long poem revolving around heroes and their exploits; however, the length and content is extremely variable.

² John Miles Foley, "Reading' Homer Through Oral Tradition." *College Literature* 34, no. 2 (2007): 2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

Homerists who initially believed they were researching and uncovering an author to accept a new reality.

Despite the drastic changes and academic tension this theory initiated, it offered explanations for many of scholars' previously unanswered questions. His student and research partner, Albert Lord, presented Parry's conclusions. His 1960 book, *The Singer of Tales*, provided the evidence for what became known as the "Oral-Formulaic Theory." Lord classifies Homer as an oral poet or bard who composes and performs their poetry simultaneously, a process termed by Gregory Nagy as "composition-in-performance".⁵ Each verse of the poem is composed using oral formulas, groups of "words which [are] regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea."⁶ Ancient singers had an extensive bank of formulas and phrases memorized, which were passed down orally by community and family members.⁷ Though these set equations are the stories' building blocks, singers "never sang a narrative the same way twice" because, without literacy, verbatim memorization was superfluous.⁸ As a result, oral storytelling originality lies not in new stories but in carrying traditional narratives to different audiences. Singers were able to manipulate their stories by expanding ornamentation, changing event sequences, omitting material, or weaving new elements into old stories.⁹ In practice, this may look like a singer catering to the busy, boisterous nature of a festival by omitting ornamental details within their tale to shorten it.¹⁰

⁵ Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), 13; Nagy, Gregory, *Homeric Questions*. (Univ. of Texas Press, 1996), 17.

⁶ Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 4.

⁷ Walter J. Ong, *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Routledge, 1991), 58.

⁸ Ibid, 60.

⁹ Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 123.

¹⁰ James A. Notopoulos, "Studies in Early Greek Oral Poetry" *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 68 (1964): 1–77.

In Homeric Greece, oral performances were common and varied. They were mainly for entertainment or ritual purposes, with the added necessity of frequent repetition to avoid losing stories to time.¹¹ Oral poetry was at the heart of social and cultural interactions, with songs performed at domestic gatherings, religious events, funerals, victories, celebrations, weddings, etc.¹² (Ford 63). Because a live performance involves both the performers and their audiences, it was less about the content of the songs and more about the context of the performance.¹³ Epic oral poetry, an inherently social act, serves as a vessel for community bonding and communication. Given its significance to Homeric Greece, it is not surprising that oral poetry appears in the transcribed *Iliad* text. Pictured most often during depictions of domesticity and scenes featuring community gatherings, these fictional performances “seem to mirror the conventions of performer-audience interaction in the ‘real world.’”¹⁴ One of which takes place on the Shield of Achilles.

This paper will focus specifically on the 134 lines detailing Hephaestus’ fabrication of Achilles’ Shield in Book 18. To contextualize the Shield’s creation and help readers unfamiliar with the epic understand the object’s significance, the following is a brief summary of key moments in the *Iliad* leading up to Book 18:

The *Iliad* follows a couple of weeks in the midst of a ten-year battle between the Achaeans (Greeks) and the Trojans. In Book 16, Achilles’ companion Patroklos dons Achilles’ armor and enters the fray in hopes of rallying the Achaeans, who are losing badly. Patroklos must masquerade as the warrior because Achilles is abstaining from battle until the leader of the

¹¹ Ong, *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 24.

¹² Andrew Ford, “Linus: The rise and Fall of Lyric Genres.” *Genre in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry: Theories and Models: Studies in Archaic and Classical Greek Song 4*, (2020): 57-81.

¹³ Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, 60.

¹⁴ Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, 55.

Achaeans, Agamemnon, apologizes for stealing his war prize. Despite warnings to evacuate the battlefield as fast as possible, Patroklos finds himself facing off against the Trojan's most powerful warrior: Hektor. Hektor kills Patroklos, strips Achilles' armor off his body, and dons it himself, displaying his achievement to whomever he encounters. At the start of Book 18, Achilles learns of Patroklos' death. He falls into a frenzy of grief as he realizes his inaction inadvertently caused the death of his companion. Motivated by feelings of guilt and responsibility, Achilles vows to return to battle and avenge Patroklos by killing Hektor. When Achilles informs his mother, the goddess Thetis, she begs him to stay away from the fighting until she can provide him with a new set of armor. She goes to Olympus to beg Hephaestus, the god of the forge, to craft one for her son. Hephaestus agrees, and Homer begins to detail the fabrication of Achilles' infamous shield.

The shield is often the subject of academic scrutiny due to its unusual level of descriptive detail and role as a metaphorical turning point for the poem. There have been many investigations into the literary substance of the description, such as W.J.T. Mitchell's book *Picture Theory*, where he proposes a word/image binary and uses the Shield as an example of the complex relationship between description and visual art.¹⁵ Thomas K. Hubbard also studied the shield in his 1992 article "Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles," wherein he viewed the Shield as an allegory for the relationship between humans and nature, identifying the shield as a representative symbol for the development of writing.¹⁶ Calvin Byre takes a different approach in his 1992 article "Narration, Description, and Theme in the Shield of Achilles," where he considers the shield as a medium to distill the larger narrative themes by simultaneously utilizing

¹⁵ W.J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Thomas K. Hubbard, "Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles." *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 2, no. 1 (1992).

narration and description.¹⁷ As the text has existed and captivated academics for thousands of years, this is but a small handful of an infinite amount of previous scholarship.¹⁸

In this thesis, we will examine the Shield from three discrete angles presented one after the other, each one building off the previous. First, we will consider the Shield as it pertains to Achilles' role as an infamous warrior and Hephaestus' status as a deity. Viewing the Shield as an object within the narrative that characters can interact with in order to understand the qualities that make this Shield special. Then, we will use our knowledge of the Shield as a tangible object to decipher its narrative significance. The scenes depicted on the Shield are separate from the poem itself, and their individual stories resonate with the *Iliad's* literary themes. By close reading the scenes that decorate the face of the Shield, we can identify the key themes represented by Hephaestus, who effectively creates a miniature representation of the poem itself. As the poem's distilled narrative becomes encircled within the edges of the Shield, the object becomes a microcosm for the epic, holding the text within itself. Finally, we will take the thematic representations one step further by examining the Shield as a poetic act rather than a static passage. The composition-in-performance depictions and the narrator's proximity to a deity place Homer in the *Iliad*. Equating his oral poetics to divine fabrication elevates Homer's position to that of a god, which, when viewed with the Shield's tangibility and metaphorical significance, cements the *Iliad* as a holistic representation of Homer's perspective on oral poetry.

¹⁷ Calvin S. Byre, "Narration, Description, and Theme in the Shield of Achilles." *The Classical Journal* 88, no.1 (1992).

¹⁸ See the following for more examples of existing scholarship on the Shield of Achilles: E. Michin, "Describing and Narrating in Homer's *Iliad*," in E.A. Mackay (ed.), *Signs of Orality* (Leiden, 1998), 49-6.; Eric Cullhead. "Movement and sound on the shield of Achilles in ancient exegesis." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2014): 192-219.; P.R. Hardie, "Imago Mundi: Cosmological and Ideological Aspects of the Shield of Achilles," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 105 (1985): 11-31; K. Atchity, *Homer's Iliad: The Shield of Memory*. (Illinois Univ. Press, 1978); A.S. Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* (London, 1995).

Chapter 1: The Shield as a Shield

Throughout this first chapter, we are going to take a look at the Shield of Achilles as an object in the epic. We will examine the appearance of the Shield, its material makeup, and characters' interactions with the object to establish a basic understanding of the passage's content. Later metaphorical analysis will build off this foundation, illustrating the interconnected nature of the ekphrasis, its context, and its implications. The Shield is a unique object in the *Iliad*, as it is the only piece of armor fabricated in front of the audience. This stands at odds with the other few instances of fabrication, which are mainly textiles and tapestries woven by Helen and Andromache.¹⁹ The contrast between domestic labor and crafting an object of war is compounded by their creators. The Shield is specially crafted by a god, as opposed to the mortal wives of heroes. The singular instance of divine fabrication aligns with the Shield's recipient: Achilles, the son of a goddess and the most talented warrior in the epic. Achilles' exceptional reputation and the Shield's individualistic creation stand out as markers of the object's distinctness within the narrative.

Literarily, the Shield is unique because of its abnormally long description; no other object in the *Iliad* is afforded the same attention. For reference, the rest of Achilles' new set of armor is afforded less than ten total lines of description. The Shield's ekphrasis focuses on the decorations adorning the object, allowing the audience to clearly visualize it. The term ekphrasis refers to extended literary descriptions detailing the appearance of a work of art.²⁰ The described decorations take the form of generic natural features and different scenes featuring human life,

¹⁹ See: Helen weaving (3.152-159); Andromache weaving (22.584-586).

²⁰ D. P. Fowler, "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 81, (1991); Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 152-180.

“embody[ing] a representation of the world.”²¹ The initial component of the circular Shield described are the three metallic rings on the outermost edge, which create a border around the Shield’s entirety. Though the rings’ materials are not specified, Hephaestus is shown working with tin, bronze, silver, and gold in the forge, leading most Homerists to agree the concentric rings are crafted of a combination of these metals. These metals are also understood to make up the additional decorations engraved on the face of the Shield.

The centermost decoration on the Shield is an iconographic overview of the cosmos with images of the earth, sky, sun, moon, and stars. When observed concurrently, the metallic border and cosmic core simulate the bookends of a universe enclosed on the face of the Shield, holding the following events within. Contributing to the simulated universe are the anthropocentric scenes that constitute the rest of the decorations. The scenes, or vignettes, are described in detail and reside in the “center of the shield,” which exhausts the account of these scenes’ placement. Avoiding an explicit spatial explanation veils the precise appearance from the audience, instead, the vignettes are differentiated by content and the transitory formula “And on the shield he set” repeated between each. The results are various portraits illustrating the natural and domestic world. These 134 lines would be spoken aloud by the oral poet Homer, but the divine origin of the art should not be overlooked. Though Homer is responsible for the description, the decorations are meant to depict Hephaestus’ view of humanity. It is impossible to separate the Shield from its creator and creation, meaning the god’s involvement in the fabrication elevates the Shield’s narrative significance and the poet’s authority as an artist. As we explore the Shield’s appearance, keep the divine and mortal collaboration in mind—all of these descriptions are divine action as interpreted by a human poet.

²¹ R.B. Rutherford, *Homer: Iliad Book XVIII* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), 26.

The first scene following the depiction of the central cosmos is of two opposing cities, one of peace and one of war. The city of peace is captured in a snapshot of domesticity, where a wedding celebration has the inhabitants singing and dancing in a central marketplace. The city is described like a sweeping camera, the focus following the characters as the narration develops. A quarrel breaks out between two men involving murder and money, and the narrative shifts to show these men on trial. A judge appears, along with heralds and councilors, as the crowd respectfully gives their opinions on the matter. The councilors follow with their own opinions one by one, and the judge awards two pounds of gold to the citizen whose “judgment was the fairest.”²² The characters' linear plot development and movement exemplify an issue of perception that can be attributed to Hephaestus' divine status. The god impossibly engraves temporally dependent events on an inanimate object. As a result, the scenes become less like static images and more like miniature stories. Homer goes beyond a visual description to better communicate the dynamism of Hephaestus' creation by beginning with a celebration, transitioning to conflict, and ending with a resolution. This clear beginning, middle, and end categorize the city of peace scene as a narrative, opposing the unchanging appearance of a work of visual art.

At odds with the domestic joy introducing the city of peace, the city of war is presented as a settlement surrounded by two armies, one labeled besiegers and the other defenders.²³ Again, Homer's narration details motion and human will over time, capturing a quarrel between the leaders of the siege. As the leaders debate, the defenders, led by Ares and Athena, mobilize. The battle aspect of the city of war is catalyzed by a trick played on two herdsman. The merry men and their livestock are ambushed and killed by a group of raiders, and the calamity catches

²² *Iliad*: 18.631.

²³ *Iliad*: 18.635 & 638.

the attention of the opposing army camped nearby. An ambush's dependency on linear time and the subsequent defensive reaction exemplify the passage as narratively driven rather than a static, tactile description. Once in motion, the fighting escalates quickly, and personified Mayhem, Aggression, and Doom join the fray. Soldiers fight, bleed, die, and are dragged off the field as corpses. A city of war indeed.

The narration continues to hold cinematic characteristics in the next scene as farmers till their land; the description tracks the repetitive motion of livestock pulling a plow and the cyclical routine of the farmers' labor. Unlike the previous scenes, the physical substance of the shield is introduced, exposing Hephaestus' artistic techniques. The earth is described as "grow[ing] black behind them as if plowed, though it was made of gold."²⁴ Examining the artwork's materialism reasserts the uniqueness of this object's fabrication. Reminding the audience that these vignettes are engraved on an inanimate object emphasizes the conflict between the dynamism of the scenes and the limitations of visual art. Artwork is static, yet this scene depicts an evolving process that alters the decorations' appearance. The Shield challenges a human understanding of materiality because inanimate objects ordinarily cannot display movement or alter their appearance independently. Witnessing the dynamic decorations forces the audience to reckon with the impossibility of fully conceptualizing the object. The unknown product of an object fabricated outside the realm of human creativity and perception, the Shield works hard to remain just out of reach—letting Homer and Hephaestus occupy the special position of grasping a full material understanding. The confusion surrounding the depiction of narrative and physical movement on the Shield is compounded by the lack of information about the scenes' placement. The juxtaposition of intense description and vague spatial positioning creates a liminal space for the

²⁴ *Iliad*: 18.681-2.

shield to occupy, veiled in obscurity. Hephaestus' status as a deity distances his work from the audience, and humans can never completely understand what he is capable of. Hephaestus' unfathomable power, as well as his identity as a master forger, gives the Shield and its description permission to exceed human artistic ability. As he is the sole witness of the fabrication, it is up to Homer to communicate this unique object's appearance to the audience. Veiling the precise physical layout by spending time intimately describing usually static scenes in motion gives power to Hephaestus and Homer, increasing the object's significance in the epic. Thus, both the creator and recipient are marked as central to the poem's depiction of creation and perception of art.

A corn harvest is observed step-by-step in the next scene, spotlighting individuals of varying status and their roles in the process. Behind the harvest, heralds are butchering oxen to prepare a feast, an occurrence crucial to the plot of the *Iliad* and a narrative-type scene common in Oral-Formulaic poetry.²⁵ A plentiful vineyard is then described in detail, distinct from previous agricultural scenes in its lack of narrative and focus on spatial awareness. This is another scene where the materiality of the artwork is mentioned; the grapes are black, the vines are gold, the posts are silver, the ditch surrounding the vineyard is blue, and the fence is tin.²⁶ Just as quickly as it began, the physical description fads into a continuous narrative where boys and girls carry grapes to the center of the vineyard, where they sing and dance accompanied by a child strumming the lyre and singing "the Linus song."²⁷ I will analyze the Linus song in chapter two, but for now, it is important to mention the significance of oral poetry's presence on the Shield, as the *Iliad* would have been sung in similar circumstances.

²⁵ Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 147.

²⁶ *Iliad*: 18.699-703.

²⁷ *Iliad*: 18.710.

Moving away from organized social interactions, the Shield returns to rural agricultural scenes as a pair of lions stalk and kill a bull. The rest of the herd, along with four heralds and nine dogs, witness the slaughter but are too frightened to take action. The lions' ambush and feast are described in gruesome detail, exemplifying "the need of the Homeric style to leave nothing which it mentions half in darkness."²⁸ This scene exemplifies the divine ability to engrave non-physical dynamic elements. Homer describes the sounds of the bull "bellow[ing] loudly" and the dogs barking, defying the medium of tactile art.²⁹ He also adds that the dogs "were afraid to bite / the lions," explicitly stating an emotional reaction.³⁰ The inclusion of emotions, reactions, and sounds, as well as the sequential dependence of an ambush narrative, push the boundaries of the Shield's physical materiality to further the description's efficacy. Bordering on concrete and abstract conceptualization, the tension between the extensive detail provided about the divinely-wrought, multi-sensory scenes, and its physical impossibility create a paradox of fabrication.

The audience is hearing a description of an unperceivable object, yet an image emerges in the mind. Homer's composition and performance of the Shield's fabrication circumvents the obstacle of physical impossibility by taking advantage of the redirection achieved by in depth descriptions. These descriptions that include movement and sound occupy narrative space; while Homer details these divine engravings, he cannot describe the concrete physicality. His manipulation of the poem's focus to avoid substance in favor of narration allows the audience to picture the object, despite the unfeasible appearance. We can choose to accept Hephaestus' power to create material movement, understand the scenes as Homer taking narrative liberty for

²⁸ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2013), 25.

²⁹ *Iliad*: 18.721 & 726.

³⁰ *Iliad*: 18.721.

entertainment purposes, or simply ignore the movement and picture the Shield as a mutable object. Homer's poetry creates a paradox for us to contemplate while reading, refusing to give a concrete answer in favor of embodying the human inability to understand divine capabilities.

Hephaestus then crafts a celebration scene that takes place on a dance floor likened to Daedalus' mythical creation for Ariadne. Numerous individuals of all ages are dressed to the nines and dancing together. Around them are crowds of observers enjoying the spectacle. Unlike the linear story of the city of peace's revelry, this celebration has no established plotline. Instead, the celebrants' appearance and motions are explored in detail. After the dancers are introduced through their marriage status and clothing, the poem likens their dancing to a potter spinning their wheel, tracking their movements as they form and dispel various circles and chains. Their joy and movement remain uninterrupted by conflict, concluding the Shield's depiction of the world with a challenging contrast to its purpose: a utilitarian object of war.

To finish his creation, Hephaestus places the river Ocean just inside the three-ringed border, framing the entirety of the aforementioned scenes. Ancient Greeks did not conceptualize the earth as a sphere, nor did they recognize the finite distinctions between land and water that can easily be observed on a modern map. Without this knowledge, the earth appeared to extend infinitely, encouraging the Greeks to organize the world with socially constructed binaries, "marking off a finite stretch of earth" from the limitless surroundings.³¹ The ocean became a ubiquitous boundary for all land masses; the Ancient Greeks "deciding that, in whatever direction one travelled, the land must eventually end and water begin."³² Though the epithet awarded to the ocean is "river," the water was understood to extend forever, encircling the world

³¹ James Romm, *The Edges of Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 10.

³² Romm, *The Edges of Earth in Ancient Thought*, 11.

with an endless, uncrossable boundary.³³ On the Shield, the ocean is pictured closer to its epithet, a discrete entity that winds around the Shield. The anthropocentric scenes enclosed within depictions of natural phenomena suggest the creation of a generalized universe. The oceanic border has the same role as the river Ocean: a border around the world. Surrounding the figurative cosmos, the river Ocean encloses Hephaestus' creation and establishes the decorative images as divine representations constituting an entire universe, complete with heavenly bodies, animals, and humans. This concept can be identified as the "Shield's reality," and it separates the Shield and its contents from its surroundings. Separating the Shield's reality from the *Iliad's* complicates the paradox of perception even further. An entire universe pictured on a shield is impossible for human comprehension and could be responsible for the overwhelmed and fearful reactions of the non-divine characters in the epic. Understanding the Shield as an artistic representation of a self-contained universe is critical to understanding its larger, metaphorical role in the epic.

Once completed, the Shield is a glittering, hefty object that terrifies everyone except Achilles, whose ineffable bravery and divine lineage afford him the strength to observe it. The impressive decorations laid by Hephaestus' hands present an indescribable visual of the universe in its entirety, forcing overwhelmed and trembling viewers to avert their eyes. The audience can never be confronted with the Shield in its entirety; they are separated by time, space, and mortality. The description is focused on the Shield's creation, rather than the final product, emphasizing the divine ability to artistically create entire realities and enclose them within the borders of a material object. This brings us back to the paradox of perception. Homer's narration describes an unobservable object visually for 134 lines.

³³ Romm, *The Edges of Earth in Ancient Thought*, 15-16.

The ekphrasis, which occupies the space between visual and literary art, simultaneously occupies the liminality between divine and mortal creativity.

Chapter 2: The Shield as the Poem

In literary studies, an elongated passage such as this one is known as an ekphrasis. More specifically, an ekphrasis is an extended literary passage dedicated to visually describing a work of art. Often, the poet focuses on one aspect of the art at a time, elaborating on the appearance, like describing a face one feature at a time. Homer's description of the Shield component by component in vivid detail categorizes Achilles' Shield as an exemplary ekphrasis. In fact, the passage is widely regarded as the prototypical ekphrasis.³⁴ More than illustrating an art piece for the audience, ekphrasis can be a useful tool for authors on a thematic or metaphoric level. One of the main literary effects of ekphrasis is a pause in narrative time. This concept is explored by scholar D.P. Fowler in his article, "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis," where he labels ekphrasis "the paradigm example of narrative pause."³⁵ As an author spends time describing an object to the audience, they depart from narrating events that move the plot forward. In the *Iliad*, the battle between the Trojans and the Achaeans is delegated to the background, as is Achilles' story, in favor of witnessing Hephaestus craft the Shield.

Though the language in these passages is often elaborate and the departure from the narrative can be interpreted as distracting, it would be a mistake to label these descriptions superfluous. Rather than writing ekphrastic description off as simple ornamentation, Fowler suggests an alternate perspective that blends narration and description for a more comprehensive view of Achilles' Shield.³⁶ Fowler recognizes the common opinion that description is redundant because it lacks narrative power, but reminds his audience that description has social meaning

³⁴ Micheal Squire, "Ekphrasis at the Forge and the Forging of Ekphrasis: The 'Shield of Achilles' in Graeco-Roman Word and Image." *Word and Image* 20, no 2. (2013): 157.; James A. Francis, "Metal Maidens, Achilles' Shield, and Pandora: The Beginnings of 'Ekphrasis.'" *American Journal of Philology* 130, no. 1 (2009): 6.

³⁵ Fowler, "Narrate and Describe," 25.

³⁶ Fowler, "Narrate and Describe," 27.

and connotations.³⁷ No description can ever be objective, as it is always presented from the point of view of the author or the narrator; therefore, description holds narrative properties in its ability to communicate contextual information.³⁸ The elaborate descriptions and supplemental information allows the author to implicitly, or explicitly, reference thematic components of the narrative at large. Because of the resulting pocket of time, authors and their audiences have the space contemplate the object's description and compare it to the narrative at large.³⁹ Different metaphors and figurative language in the ekphrasis can then be interpreted based on the plot, characters, and other narrative elements. With the Shield of Achilles, the scenes described can take on metaphorical roles and implicate broader ideas without impacting Achilles' story. Homer gives the audience 134 lines of charged description which they may dissect at their discretion.

One technique scholars use to analyze the relationship between the Shield and the *Iliad* is identifying references to the larger plot and determining their significance. For example, some scholars pinpoint the agricultural and domestic scenes as a direct reference to the preceding narrative event.⁴⁰ Achilles has just decided to rejoin the war effort to avenge the death of his beloved Patroklos.⁴¹ He does so despite his predetermined fate: If Achilles fights the Trojans, he dies in infamy. While Achilles grieves Patroklos, Thetis and her nereids grieve for Achilles. The goddess grieves for her son, knowing his decision sealed his fate. This moment is particularly moving because the prophecy that revealed Achilles' death also gave him the option to live: If

³⁷ Fowler, "Narrate and Describe," 27.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 29.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 27.

⁴⁰ For more on the resonance between the agricultural scenes and Achilles' decision to reenter the battle see Byre's recap of Andersen and Gärtner's arguments: Calvin Byre, "Narration, Description, and Theme in the Shield of Achilles." *The Classical Journal* 88, no. 1 (1992): 5.

⁴¹ *Iliad*: 18.413-417.

Achilles avoids the fighting and returns home, he will live an uneventful and anonymous life. Thetis grieves not only her son, but the life he could've had.

A number of Homerists, including Øivind Andersen and Stephen Scully, understand the scenes featuring farming and rural life to be a reflection of Thetis' wishes for Achilles.⁴² As the audience sits with the in-depth descriptions of mortals harvesting crops and caring for livestock, they are forced to reckon with the fact that the recipient of this Shield will never experience this life. References to the plot such as these connect the ekphrasis to the narrative and illuminate events which have resonances with thematic ideas. As we compare the agricultural scenes to the fate of Achilles, we recognize the cost of war as the loss of peace and domesticity.

Another quality of the Shield's ekphrasis that encourages metaphorical interpretation of the description is Homer's use of universality. That is to say, the events and characters in the scenes are generic enough to be applicable to a number of situations. Universality in an ekphrasis allows the author to make larger thematic claims because it removes the description from the immediate context of the narrative and encourages broader connections to the text and beyond. Universality is an extremely common element of the Shield's ekphrasis for dissection and evaluation by scholars. For example, Thomas K. Hubbard views the last scene on the Shield, the choral dancing sequence, to be a reflection of the *Iliad's* artistic qualities.⁴³ The nameless, faceless characters gather to celebrate, listen to music, and dance without clear motivations; there is no event or ritual purpose for these festivities, at least not pictured on the Shield. The generic characters with no specific motivation make the scene universally applicable to art as a concept, rather than art in Homeric literature. Hubbard identifies this representation of "art for art's sake"

⁴² Byre, "Narration, Description, and Theme in the Shield of Achilles," 35; Stephen Scully, "Reading the Shield of Achilles: Terror, Anger, Delight," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 101 (2003): 31.

⁴³ Hubbard, "Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles," 33.

communicated with “decontextualized universality and objectivity” as applicable to the world at large.⁴⁴ Via the joyous dancers and musicians, Homer includes a commentary on art within his own work of art, thus encouraging contemplation in the audience about poetry, music, and dance as a whole. Hubbard concludes that this scene metaphorically represents art’s ties to “social community and artistic sophistication,” a theme never explicitly expressed in the *Iliad*, but relevant to its cultural context.⁴⁵

Though looking at individual aspects of the passage is important, synthesizing the content and thematic resonances of separate scenes can be beneficial for identifying the possible implications of Achilles’ Shield as an entity. Oliver Taplin refers to the Shield as a microcosm, which I find to be particularly pertinent.⁴⁶ A microcosm can be defined as a text that summarizes or contains the key concepts of a larger work or idea. In his article, “The Shield of Achilles Within the *Iliad*,” Taplin emphasizes that a microcosm doesn’t mean the text includes every aspect of a work, rather, a microcosmic text will include suggestions of events or ideas that remind the audience of the larger work.⁴⁷ Building off of Taplin’s microcosmic theory, the Shield of Achilles with its wide array of vignettes decoratively depicting various aspects of life is a microcosmic view of the world of the *Iliad*. Within the ekphrasis are references to crucial aspects of the *Iliad*’s plot that touch on the epic’s wider themes ranging from the tensions of war, to the benefits of community, to humanity’s relationship with divinities, and more. During the scene featuring the city of war, the catalyst to the battle is described as such:

⁴⁴ Hubbard, “Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles,” 33.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 33.

⁴⁶ Oliver Taplin, “The Shield of Achilles within the *Iliad*.” *Greece & Rome* 27, no.1 (1980): 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 12.

When their comrades, who sat gathered / before the meeting place, heard the commotion / among the animals, at once they mounted / their chariots behind their high-hoofed horses / and galloped to the riverbank, and there / they fought each other, hurling spears of bronze.⁴⁸

The city of war, and the battle that takes place within, are reminiscent of the main conflict of the epic: the Trojan War. Two armies sit gathered on a battle field, much like the Achaeans and Trojans reside across from each other on the plain of Ilion. This passage includes mentions of chariots, horses, and spears of bronze, each of which is utilized by the Trojans and Achaeans. Directly preceding the ekphrasis, the audience witnesses Patroklos' death, which was catalyzed by his departure from the safety of Achilles' horse-drawn chariot. Once he was on the battlefield, he became vulnerable to Hector's spear, the weapon which caused his demise. Referencing the spatial and technical aspects of the Trojan War evoke an emotional and intellectual connection between the city of war and rest of the *Iliad's* narrative.

This connection fostered by direct plot references is developed from a referential analysis to a metaphorical one through its generic language. Refusing to name specific people and places holds space for a universal application of the city of war. Calling the army's camp "the meeting place," the battlefield "the riverbank," and referring to the soldiers as "they" removes the Iliadic context, furthering connections to war as a concept rather than the Trojan War specifically. Combining the textual references and universality sets up the ekphrasis to comment on war thematically, and consequently, apply those thematic conclusions back to the *Iliad*. The numerous deaths following this excerpt conclude the references to war with a bloody conclusion,

⁴⁸ *Iliad*: 18.658-663.

suggesting the glory of battle comes with violent and devastating consequences; a claim which can be identified at numerous places in the epic.⁴⁹

The corn-harvest scene is also viable to represent larger claims of the poem. Many scholars have touched on the implications of the rural agricultural scenes, such as the aforementioned analysis by Byre, and the attention is warranted.⁵⁰ Analyzing Homer's depiction of community in a rural, agricultural context helps the audience understand the role of community in the epic at large. The corn-harvest engraved on the Shield is described, not visually, but through a cinematic overview of the process:

Three people were there to bind the sheaves, and children followed, / scooped up the sheaves of corn and cradled them / and gave them to the adults to bind up. / The master stood in silence with the workers, / straddling a furrow with his staff in hand. / His heart was glad. Beneath a tree, the heralds / worked to prepare a feast. They bustled round / and butchered an enormous ox. The women / mixed plentiful supplies of bright white barley / to make a supper for the laborers.⁵¹

The butchering of an ox is a reoccurring type scene in oral poetry, and in the *Iliad* these scenes are often related to religious rites or communal feasts, each of which results in a gathering of warriors.⁵² The connection between agricultural sustenance and community is not coincidental; it likens the domestic life of the Shield's figures to that of the *Iliad*'s characters, suggesting that the way of life depicted on the Shield is similar, if not equivalent. Therefore, any metaphorical conclusions gained from evaluating the ornamentation can be applied to the epic as well.

⁴⁹ See Patroklos' death (16.971-1088); Hektor's death (22.388-500); Diomedes *aristeia* (5.1-800).

⁵⁰ For more analyses of agriculture on the Shield of Achilles see: R.B. Rutherford, *Homer: Iliad Book XVIII*. (2019): 33, 211-227; Hubbard, "Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles," 31-34; Taplin, "The Shield of Achilles within the *Iliad*."

⁵¹ *Iliad*: 18.687-697.

⁵² See Achaeans in Chryse (1.601-634); Patroklos' funeral (23.38-79); Post-battle feast (7.592-616)

Outside of the Shield's materiality, Homer's narration within the ekphrasis of Achilles' shield can be interpreted as reflecting the epic's themes. Scully theorizes that the order in which Hephaestus crafts the various cosmic elements on the face of the Shield is reminiscent of the creation of the universe⁵³ He says:

As if Hephaistos were creating the universe from its beginnings, he first fashions on the shield an image of Earth, Heaven and Sea, followed by the Sun, Moon, and stars (18.483 – 489)...while at the end he fashions around the rim of the shield and around the realm of humankind an image of River Ocean (18-607-608). Such framing of the human within the broader settings of Earth, Heaven, Sun, Moon, stars, and River Ocean, is Olympian...⁵⁴

Scully believes Hephaestus is mimicking the Ancient Greek mythological origins of the universe: Earth (Gaia) emerging from Chaos first, followed by the Underworld (Tartarus), and darkness (Erebus).⁵⁵ These primordial beings then create Night, Day, and the Ocean (Oceanus). Beginning the Shield as the universe began, with the creation of heavenly bodies, establishes the fictional object as intertwined with the poetic tradition and mythological understanding of reality. The divine responsibility for this artistic representation of the universe speaks to divine presence in human lives, commenting on the uncontrollable nature of the deities who manipulate fate. Fate and divine intervention are consistent themes throughout the epic, and the introduction of the Shield's cosmic background before the presentation of the anthropocentric scenes establishes a hierarchy of power within the object and the rest of the poem.⁵⁶

⁵³ Scully, "Reading the Shield of Achilles: Terror, Anger, Delight," 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 45.

⁵⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans Michael Heumann (Imperial Valley College, 1955), 116-135.

⁵⁶ Scully, "Reading the Shield of Achilles: Terror, Anger, Delight," 45.

In the previous chapter, similarly, we discussed interpreting Hephaestus crafting an entire universe on the face of the Shield. Furthering this, the humans depicted on the Shield (metonyms for the human race) comment on the average human life in a polytheistic culture. However, rather than representing a commentary on human life in a polytheistic culture, I believe the figural humans are commentary on the *Iliad*. The numerous thematic connections that can be made by analyzing each scene, each line, of the ekphrasis encourage a synthesis of conceptual throughlines and conclusions. When viewed cohesively, the Shield of Achilles becomes a microcosm of the *Iliad*'s plot and key themes. Each individual scene adds another layer of metaphorical meaning contributing to the mini-*Iliad*. Much like the encapsulation of the Shield's reality between the cosmos and the ocean, the microcosmic *Iliad* is bookended by the natural elements in the center and border, legitimizing its existence as an independent universe while simultaneously placing the Shield within the *Iliad*'s narrative frame. The microcosmic *Iliad* is communicated by Homer during the narrative pause inherent to an ekphrasis, which allows deeper analysis of the claims suggested by the description's use of references to the plot and universality.

Chapter 3: The Shield as Poet's

Thematically, it is clear that the scenes and decorations engraved on the Shield of Achilles serve as a microcosm of the *Iliad* in its entirety. Now, we are going to take a step back and explore some of the technical and narratological decisions made by Homer and put these in conversations with our previous discussion about ancient composition-in-performance oral poetry. Homer's position as the sole witness to the divine fabrication process elevates his status, revealing the bard's opinion on the role oral poetry plays in ancient Greek society. The Shield's depiction in the midst of creation reflects the simultaneous creation and presentation intrinsic to Oral Formulaic poetry, and the similarities designate the ekphrasis as a space for subjective commentary on the poet's creativity. The Shield becomes a product of the poet himself.

To explore Homer's communication of this epic poem, I will be leaning on Irene de Jong's explanation of narratology's basics from her book, *Narratology and Interpretation*. In a narrative, there exists a hierarchy that separates the story from its composition.⁵⁷ The narrator and the characters of a story exist on a separate plane than the poet, the main difference being awareness: an author is the only one who knows they are involved in storytelling, whereas the characters and narrator are usually ignorant to their fictionality.⁵⁸ In the rare instances where characters are conscious of their role in a narrative are purposeful rhetorical devices, like a character "breaking the fourth wall" and speaking directly to the audience for comedic or dramatic purposes. In oral storytelling, the dynamics between the narrator and author differ because the time of composition and performance are one in the same. The audience witnesses

⁵⁷ Irene de Jong, *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature* (De Gruyter, 2016), 89.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 89.

the narrator telling their story while the author composes it, closing the distance between author and narrator until they become inseparable.

The narrator-author relationship is crucial in understanding the narratological manipulation of the Shield's ekphrasis because the passage is focalized through the narrator. Focalization refers to the point of view of a story, if it is focalized through a character, the events are communicated through their perspective.⁵⁹ The representation of Achilles' Shield is focalized through Homer, as he is the only interlocuter, besides Hephaestus, present at the time of fabrication. Because of his sole presence, de Jong attributes "very special powers" to Homer.⁶⁰ It is as if he were granted heightened status to tell this story. One may argue that the ekphrasis is focalized through Hephaestus because of the repetition of the formula "And on the shield he set" as well as the improbability of a mortal's presence in a god's dwelling. However, the simultaneity of composition-in-performance leaves no room for Hephaestus' perspective to be translated into Homer's words; it is because of his role as a bard that Homer is granted divine proximity. The first line of the poem, "Goddess, sing of the cataclysmic wrath / of great Achilles," is a reference to the ancient belief that bards were gifted stories to relay by the Muses, the goddesses of song and music.⁶¹ Homer is not recounting a story told through the perspective of Hephaestus, he is inventing a story as he speaks using the information divinely passed down to him. Creativity in an oral society lies in the retelling of existing stories according to different social contexts, rather than the creation of new narratives.

⁵⁹ de Jong, *Narratology and Interpretation*, 88.

⁶⁰ Irene de Jong, "The Shield of Achilles: From Metalepsis to Mise En Abyme." *Ramus: Critical Studies in Greek and Roman Literature* 40, no. 1 (2011): 5.

⁶¹ *Iliad*: 1.1-2; Aldo Brancacci, "The Origins of the Reflection on Music in Greek Archaic Poetry." *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* 34, no.1 (2016): 13.

Homer's creative role as the inventor of the poem is acknowledged during his description of the grape harvest engraved on the Shield. Whilst boys and girls gather grapes from the vines, "a child / strum[s] on a well-tuned lyre —enchancing music — / and s[ings] the Linus song in high, clear tones."⁶² The Linus song belongs to a genre of oral poems performed during ritualistic community interactions such as weddings, harvests, and funerals.⁶³ Because the Linus song and the *Iliad* were both instances of composition-in-performance, the inclusion of the poem deepens the Shield's significance from a thematic reflection of the epic to an artistic one. Composition would look identical for both the Linus song and the *Iliad*, and technically, at the moment of performance, Homer creates both. These blurry distinctions challenge the narratological boundaries between character, narrator, and author as described by de Jong.

This oral poem within an oral poem and the blurring of the boundaries between them is reminiscent of W.J.T. Mitchell's work with metapictures in his book *Picture Theory*. Mitchell introduces a metapicture as a self-referential image, such as a painting about painting.⁶⁴ The Linus song is a metapicture because it references oral poetry within an oral performance. Taking this a step further, Homer's creative authority to both songs (Linus and *Iliad*) pushes the metapicture to another level, an effect known as *mise en abyme*. Mitchell, dealing with images, defines *mise en abyme* as a "picture that represents itself."⁶⁵ The experience of *mise en abyme* is similar to that of standing between two mirrors, an infinite reproduction the same image. Translating this to literature, a text that produces *mise en abyme* is one that contains a duplication of itself. The Linus song is an example of *mise en abyme* because it duplicates its framing image:

⁶² *Iliad*: 18.708-710.

⁶³ Andrew Ford, "Linus: The Rise and Fall of Lyric Genres." *Genre in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry: Theories and Models: Studies in Archaic and Classical Greek Song* 4 (2020): 63.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 41-42.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 56.

⁶⁵ See, *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez as an example of visual *mise en abyme*.

an oral poem performed by Homer. The result is a theoretically infinite loop of *Iliad* performances: Homer sings of a bard, the bard is performing a song composed by Homer, in his song Homer sings of a bard, the bard sings a Homeric song, and so on and so forth.

The ekphrasis of Achilles' shield contains another instance of *mise en abyme*, though this one requires more theoretical effort. Our previous understanding of Achilles' Shield as a microcosm of the *Iliad* causes a similar infinite loop of *Iliads*. This time, instead of replicating an example of the creative process, the complete poem is distilled and placed within itself. The Shield becomes inseparable from the poem; a summary cannot be described without referencing the source and this microcosmic *Iliad* cannot be described without referencing the rest of *Iliad*. Again, the borders between author, narrator, and characters are blurred as the framing image and duplicate intertwine.

Homer's inclusion of his own creative process and creations on the object fabricated by Hephaestus' suggests a comparison between the two. As stated by de Jong, the fact that Homer was able to witness and relay the fabrication of the Shield puts him in a unique position. She posits that Homer's presence aligns the poet with Hephaestus, and by "portraying himself as working together with a *visual* artist" he emphasizes the creative authority of "his own *verbal* art."⁶⁶ His proximity to the deity boosts the ethos of his work. A telling phrase in de Jong's statement is the present participle tense of "working," as it hints at processional nature of the Shield and poem. As the audience listens to the *Iliad*, the poem and Shield are being fabricated concurrently. The two instances of *mise en abyme* previously discussed exist in progress. The bard can only stand-in for Homer if he continues to sing and the microcosmic duplication results from the pause in narration ekphrasis creates. More than associating his poetry with divinity, I

⁶⁶ de Jong, "The Shield of Achilles," 10.

believe Homer's focalization of the ekphrasis and the subsequent infinite reproductions categorize the divine object as an arena for oral poetry. The most important object, the object given the most narrative focus, is indicative of Homer and his craft. In the ekphrasis, Hephaestus takes a back seat, as Homer's perspective on poetry is brought to the forefront. The *mise en abyme* undermines Hephaestus' role by minimizing his artwork in favor of showcasing Homer's. The poet is elevated to a higher artistic authority than the god, revealing himself as the true creator of Achilles' Shield within the narrative and on a thematic and artistic level.

Conclusions

We began this paper with an overview of Oral-Formulaic poetry in ancient Greece around the eighth and seventh centuries. We learned that the poet behind the *Iliad* would have performed the poem in front of a live audience, collapsing the space between the author, narrator, and audience. Homer's involvement with the content and context of the *Iliad* is implicitly woven into the ekphrasis of the Shield of Achilles. The ekphrasis, considered the first of its kind once transcribed, touches on the physical substance and metaphorical significance of the object. The microcosmic qualities of the Shield's decorations focalized through Homer's perspective creates a paradoxical universe that duplicates the poem within itself thematically and creatively. The ekphrasis is especially complex because of the presence of Hephaestus, who fabricates the shield in front of the audience—a process which can be directly equated to Homer's composition-in-performance of the *Iliad*. Homer identifies oral poetry as a valuable medium to recreate what he believed to be the pillars of the human condition, emphasizing the importance of artists by classifying his talents as divine.

The first hint to Homer's belief in the elevated creative properties of poetry is the lack of a concrete physical description of the Shield's layout. The poet avoids explicitly outlining the placement of the decorations, choosing instead to bring the vignettes pictured to life by detailing movement, emotions, sound, and time, each of which are ordinarily incompatible with a fabricated object. The dynamic and narrative features of the vignettes challenge an ordinary conceptualization of physical art as static and tactile. The inability to differentiate the poet's speculative narration from the object's description veils the Shield's materiality from the audience. This mystifies the object and gives power to Homer and Hephaestus, as they are the only two beings to explicitly witness the fabrication.

The unobservable nature of the object is expanded upon when one considers the center and border of the Shield. Scholars have been fascinated by the metaphorical implications of the extended description, many taking the anthropocentric scenes as metonymic for the human experience. Often referenced as thematically significant are the Shield's references to the larger plot and its universality. Common readings include a commentary on Achilles' fate, art, and the dichotomy between war and peace. The center and border of the Shield elevate the thematic commentary to self-sustaining by cordoning off the Shield's content from the rest of the epic. The numerous interpretations of the scenes can be compiled and bookended as an all-encompassing microcosm of the *Iliad's* plot and themes. Homer's use of the ekphrastic void between time and space allows him to describe a microcosmic poem mirroring larger themes without affecting the entire epic. This transitions the shield from a work of art to an icon, or an image representative of a larger idea.

The microcosmic *Iliad* expands the thematic representation to include the artistic process as one considers the ekphrasis' point of view. The oral poet holds a unique position between the narrator and the audience, in that they both experience the story simultaneously. The Linus song, an oral poem sung on the face of the shield, has the exact same composition-in-performance process as the *Iliad*. The presence of the miniature poet creates a *mise en abyme* phenomenon wherein Homer reproduces the performance of the *Iliad* within the *Iliad*. Referencing the fabrication of the poem allows Homer to represent the creative process of the poem he is performing while he is creating and performing it. *Mise en abyme* also occurs on the shield via the microcosmic mini-*Iliad* created by the enclosed thematically resonant scenes. Thus emphasizing the creative power of the bard within the borders of Oral-Formulaic poetry.

Placing himself at the helm of this instance of divine craftsmanship has implications for Homer's perspective on oral poetry within Ancient Greek society in the eighth and seventh centuries. Rather than taking a step back and embodying his position as a communicator, Homer includes himself in the fabrication process, labelling himself the inventor and not a neutral vessel for tradition. Homer places composition-in-performance poetry within the narrative through *mise en abyme* to craft in place of Hephaestus, affording his poetry divine characteristics to craft and create. He takes advantage of the ekphrastic pause to show off his artistry as a singular miracle of divine creativity.

Homer claiming responsibility for the Shield of Achilles ensures the audience is aware of the importance and centrality of his poetry in ancient tradition. The *mise en abyme* forces the audience to accompany Homer through his meditation on the intricacies of his poetry and witness the central position of a singer in an oral society—at the center of community and cultural literacy is Homer and his craft. In the midst of retelling a major mythological event to entertain and gather community together, Homer reminds the audience of poetry's importance by including representations of himself and the audience on Achilles' Shield. When viewed in the context of oral poetry, this unique diversion from an epic plot in favor of recounting an object in excruciating detail evolves from solely formulaic ornamentation to a place for Homer to display the creative and societal power afforded to him by his poetry. Identifying himself as the creator of the most important divine object in the epic mirrors the divinity and elevated social status he views as intrinsic to oral poetry.

Implications

This thesis brings a new synthesis of understanding the *Iliad* through Lord and Parry's Oral-Formulaic theory and viewing Homer as a singular author. Combining these two concepts is beneficial to fill in the blind spots common in Homeric Studies resulting from the discrete schools of thought that constitute the field. For example, the ekphrasis can (and has) be disregarded as extraneous when too much emphasis is placed on oral formulas and type scenes. On the other hand, references to oral poetry can be overlooked as background noise when a focus on narratological or literary analysis becomes too narrowed. In this project, I attempted to synthesize both sides of the Homeric Question in order to make broader conclusions about contextual resonance in the *Iliad*.

Classics is an enormous field with thousands of years and millions of scholars contributing new research and conclusions. I am almost certainly not the first person to consider this concept, but my project still brings a contemporary approach to Classics literary analysis. Hopefully, this thesis opens, or widens, doors to consider a synthesis of historical context and textual analysis. That way, the transcribed oral poem can be studied as a whole, rather than separated into its constituent characteristics.

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