'THEMES' AND 'MENTAL MOULDS':
ROGER SCHANK, MALCOLM WILLCOCK AND THE CREATION OF CHARACTER IN HOMER*

Thirty years ago the cognitive scientist Roger Schank, along with Robert Abelson, a social psychologist, developed a number of computer programs that could understand simple stories told in the real world.[1] One of the outcomes of their work with computer technology was that they were able to model satisfactorily some of the processes of the mind as it deals with the sequential information of narrative.[2] For the Homerist, whose life might otherwise be lived in a different intellectual universe, some of these insights into story structure and story processing, causal chains and the workings of memory, have already been very helpful: they have allowed us to understand and appreciate a number of compositional features of these traditional poems, beginning with Homer's so-called type-scenes.[3]

Fundamental to Schank and Abelson's research has been the conviction that knowledge, once acquired, is stored in organized form; and that our system of organization is episodic in nature, being constructed around personal experience rather than by abstract semantic categories.[4] The model that they developed for the understanding of stories (and everyday experiences) drew together four entities, each of which played a different role in that process: scripts, plans, goals and themes. The first of these entities, scripts, are generalized, standardized episodes that encapsulate everyday experience: connected sequences of events directed towards the fulfilment of a specific goal.[5] Schank and Abelson argue that we rely heavily on the scripts we store in memory as we attempt to understand events that we encounter either in the real world or in stories.[6] We all have scripts for dressing, making purchases

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[1] See R. Schank, 'Goal-based scenarios', in R. Schank and E. Langer (eds), *Beliefs, Reasoning, and Decision-making: Psycho-logic in Honor of Bob Abelson* (Hillsdale, NJ, 1994), 1–32, at 1–2. Schank's goals were to find deeper models of complex events that would enable him to understand the stories that people tell and to enable computers to understand them also; Abelson's goals were to find deeper models of complex events to analyse the thinking underlying political decision-making (and to find ways of making computers more helpful in predicting political events). The result of their collaboration was R. Schank and R. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures* (Hillsdale, NJ, 1977).

[2] Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 1–2.

[3] See, for example, E. Minchin, *Homer and the Resources of Memory: Some Applications of Cognitive Theory to the* Iliad *and the* Odyssey (Oxford, 2001). And see below.

[4] Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 17–19. This is a conviction by no means unique to cognitive science: compare F. Bartlett, *Remembering* (Cambridge, 1932) on 'schemas'; and T. van Dijk, *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse* (London, 1977) on 'frames'. For a helpful general discussion of the operation of memory from a psychological perspective, see, e.g., J. Best, *Cognitive Psychology* (St Paul, MN, 1992³), ch. 5: 'Encoding, storing, and retrieving'.

[5] Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 41.

[6] Ibid.

(whether in shops or on the internet), travelling on public transport, using libraries, cooking meals, visiting restaurants and so on.[7] There has been some discussion elsewhere of the substantial role played by scripts in the composition of the epics that we associate with Homer's name.[8] The shape and the nature of the so-called type-scenes that scholars had observed in the epics can be readily explained by reference to Schank and Abelson's scripts: those type-scenes are nothing more and nothing less than expressions of scripts that have been stored in memory, both the memory of the poet and the memory of members of his audience.[9]

In this article I consider the remaining entities – plans, goals and themes; and I shall demonstrate how these concepts, too, might help us understand aspects of the composition of the epics. Since plans, goals and themes are more closely tied to the people who do things rather than the (scripted) things that they do, I shall analyse a selection of the characters in the *Iliad* in terms of these three entities. This analysis will allow me to draw some conclusions about how the poet of the *Iliad*, who either composed traditional stories in performance or worked very close to an oral tradition, used the resources of *his* memory in the construction of the vivid and distinctive figures who live on in our own.[10] I am not the first to have broached this topic. Just as Walter Arend anticipated some aspects of the cognitive script in his analysis of Homer's type-scenes, so, as we shall see, Malcolm Willcock, in his discussion of character formation in Homer, appears to have anticipated Schank and Abelson's identification of plans, goals and themes, and the significance of such entities in the understanding of human behaviour.

PLANS, GOALS AND THEMES

Plans, goals, and themes are, in Schank's view, more important than the script.[11] Whereas scripts enable us to handle routine situations, the mechanisms that generate

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[7] These are scripts that are readily acquired in our Western culture. Although some scripts are of a general nature, others are specific to particular cultures or even sub-cultures. For some background to this point (which Schank and Abelson do not directly confront) see Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 37; E. Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), ch. 1.

[8] See Minchin (n. 3), ch. 1. For discussion of a general kind, see D. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes* (Oxford, 1995), 24–8; for discussion in relation to the Homeric epics, see 210–20.

[9] The earliest exponent of type-scenes was W. Arend, *Die typischen Scenen bei Homer* (Berlin, 1933), who anticipated many of the practical ideas that underlie the cognitive script; and cf. M. Parry, 'On typical scenes in Homer', *CPh* 31 (1936), 357–60 (an extended review of Arend's work). A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA, 1960) gives us a more developed account, based on his own observations, of the type-scene (which Lord calls the 'theme') both in Homer and in the tradition of oral epic in the former Yugoslavia. Neither Arendt nor Lord (at the time) had the advantage of more recent work on cognitive processes to help them understand these phenomena.

[10] On oral-derived texts (as distinct from oral performance), see especially J. Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The* Odyssey*,* Beowulf*, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), 5–8.

[11] See Schank (n. 1), 2. Here Schank suggests that psychologists took up the notion of scripts because scripts are testable phenomena. Indeed, he finds it ironic that the book that he and Abelson produced, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding*, is remembered as a work on scripts. He points out that goals, a category that I describe below, play a central and complex role in understanding.

these scripts help us understand situations that we have not encountered before. These particular mechanisms are the theoretical entities that Schank and Abelson have called *plans*.[12] Plans describe the sets of choices that are available to people as they strive to accomplish their goals: in response to a particular situation a person will choose and implement a particular plan of action. Plan creation, therefore, may be viewed as a form of problem-solving.[13] For example, a parent of a sick child may consider a number of options before selecting one of them: ringing the local doctor's surgery; attending the local hospital's emergency department; consulting a neighbour who is a nurse. All these options are plans.

This same activity could be examined from another perspective: that of someone who is trying to understand why an actor has acted in a particular way. The understanding of plans demands a broad knowledge of a large number of actions and the *goals* that might underpin them. If we are trying to understand events that are unfolding before us, whether in the real world or as we process a story, we make guesses about the intentions of the participants; we use these guesses to make sense of what they are doing. That is, we are trying to make a connection between the behaviour we observe and the person's goal or goals. If we cannot make this connection we cannot understand what is happening.[14]

Since all human behaviour is goal-directed, our ability to detect the activation of goals and to recognize what happens when goals compete or conflict is crucial to our understanding of events in the real world and, likewise, to our understanding of narrative – the verbal representation of event sequences. Schank and Abelson offer us a taxonomy of goals and a set of precedence rules by which we might rank them.[15] The goals they identify are satisfaction goals (which seek to extinguish a strong biological need), enjoyment goals (activities optionally pursued for enjoyment or relaxation), achievement goals (which relate to the achievement, perhaps over a long term, of some valued acquisition or social position), preservation goals (concerned with preserving or improving the health, safety, or condition of a person, a position, or property), crisis goals (a special category of preservation goals set up to handle serious and imminent threats to persons and property) and instrumental goals (which when fulfilled realize a pre-condition in the pursuit of a more general goal).[16] In the system they propose, based on psychological principles, when goals are simultaneously activated, observable priorities or 'precedence rules' are implemented: crisis goals take precedence over all others; satisfaction goals take precedence over achievement goals or enjoyment goals; and instrumental goals take on the precedence rules of the goals they serve.

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[12] See Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 70.

[13] Ibid., 73.

[14] In the course of understanding events that are happening about us we create a chain of coherence, a causal chain. This chain establishes explicit connections between each event, act and state within the action sequence that underlies the narrative. Because many of these links are not expressed in discourse, we are obliged to supply them by inference. This is why we try to identify plans and, even more importantly, goals (or 'motivation', the term that is used more commonly in literary studies). So, when in the first pages of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet insists that her husband call on the wealthy Mr Bingley, we understand that she is activating a plan to achieve her goal of a comfortable marriage for one of her daughters. (Much of the humour of the exchanges between Mr and Mrs Bennet lies in his assumed obtuseness about his wife's goals and plans.)

[15] Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 111–19.

[16] Ibid., 112–17.

One of our principal processing tasks as we observe events in the real world or process narrative is to track goals individually and in interaction with other goals, and to observe their fate. Some goals may be fulfilled promptly. In the real world this is a simple and satisfying outcome. In other cases, individuals may be obliged to pursue their goals through two or three planning routes before they achieve them. Or an individual may encounter an adverse response from a second player, whose goals conflict with his or her own. In the face of resistance the first individual may abandon one goal and select another. In these descriptions of planning failure, goal conflict and goal substitution we recognize outlines of action that are typical of the stories that we enjoy. Stories – or, at least, memorable stories – rarely recount simple goal and plan interactions. The stories that appeal to us are those that illustrate failure and frustration, and the novel use of plans to resolve problems and to attain goals.[17] For example, in our own world, stories of love's failures, frustrations and eventual triumphs are ever popular, as the continuing warm reception of Jane Austen's novels, or Mills and Boon publications, testifies.

A question remains: where do goals and plans originate? Schank and Abelson propose a range of so-called *themes*. This is the most speculative segment of their proposal. Themes are the knowledge structures that provide the background data we need to predict an individual's goals and to direct us to the plans by which he or she might achieve them.[18] If we have already identified a theme, we can begin to make sense of a person's patterns of behaviour. Or the reverse, I suggest, may be the case: on observing a person's behaviour over time we may be able to draw conclusions not only about plans and goals, but also about the themes that determine them. At this point we are able to predict behaviour.

There is no *single* source of thematic data. According to Schank and Abelson, our knowledge of an individual's themes derives from our assessment of him or her along three different dimensions. We may classify thematic knowledge in the following three sub-categories, all of which may interact in the generation of any goal: role themes, interpersonal themes and life themes.[19] The first of these sub-categories, that of role themes, holds information about the range of roles that individuals play in society.[20] The role that they adopt at any one time will depend on the physical and social context in which they are acting: it will depend on the place, the occasion and the people present.[21] Interpersonal themes describe social relationships: friendship, enmity and kinship ties.[22] Like the role theme, the interpersonal theme will generate a set of predictions about likely behaviour. When a friendship theme is active, for example, we expect that the individuals involved will want each other's approval and respect and that they will help each other to achieve their goals.[23] The third sub-category, the life theme, is the

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[17] For a definition of an interesting narrative, see R. de Beaugrande and B. Colby, 'Narrative models of action and interaction', *Cognitive Science* 3 (1979), 43–66, at 45; R. Schank, 'Interestingness: controlling inferences?', *Artificial Intelligence* 12 (1979), 273–97.

[18] Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 131–2.

[19] Ibid., 132–49.

[20] Ibid., 132–3.

[21] When we attend an academic conference in another city, for example, we assume the role of scholar for a certain period each day; at other times during our stay we take on the role of tourist; but when we are at home with our families we are more likely to assume family-centred roles.

[22] Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 138.

[23] Ibid., 140.

theme that describes an individual's general moral and ethical outlook and his or her expectations of life: personal qualities, political attitudes and ambitions, for example.[24] People will operate in accordance with a number of life themes, each of which will generate one or more goals and a set of behaviour patterns (plans) appropriate to those goals. Those plans are in turn fulfilled by the instantiation of the relevant script or scripts.[25]

When current life themes generate opposing goals, conflict within the individual may arise. A life theme differs from role and interpersonal themes in that it is not specific to a single place or occasion, or to particular players. Life themes operate continuously, and they give rise to the more general goals that guide an individual's conduct in all circumstances:[26] they affect the general character of everything a person does. Information about life themes gives us a basis on which to build our expectations about what an individual will do in a given situation.[27] In the storyworld, life themes also make a contribution to the overall structure of what is being related. In this sense they are often reflected in the theme (now used in its narrative sense) of the story.[28]

Whether we are coping with everyday life or processing narrative, our essential resource is a reservoir of knowledge, stored in organized form, about themes (about beliefs, traits and emotions), about goals and about the plans (and the action scripts) through which they are fulfilled. Our need for a storage system that is organized has been acknowledged and discussed in more recent studies.[29] Nevertheless, Schank and Abelson's outline of the relationship between all three entities is the *locus classicus*: since it is clearly stated, it is, for our non-specialist purposes, very useful. In drawing on their proposed model in order to illuminate certain aspects of the composition of the Homeric epics, I have two aims. First, I am setting out to explore the underpinnings of character construction in Homeric

[24] Ibid., 144–9. To recognize a life theme, Schank and Abelson suggest (146–8) that we identify a selection of 'theme recognizer patterns' (behavioural patterns that suggest a trend), general goals (that associate themselves with a particular life theme), instrumental goals peculiar to that theme and a set of production rules (predictions of particular behaviour in actual situations). Schank and Abelson list the following life theme types with examples from their own world: personal quality (e.g. honesty, loyalty), ambition (e.g. success, having a particular profession) lifestyle (e.g. adventure, travel), political attitude (e.g. anarchist, republican), approval (e.g. fulfil father's expectations), physical sensations (e.g. staying high).

[25] So, in *Iliad* 23, Antilochus, being competitive (a life theme that will be discussed further below), is eager to do well in the chariot race (an achievement goal). So he drives his horses hard (his plan is realized by a verbal script *threaten* and the action script *pursuit*) and appears to be causing danger to Menelaus. For Menelaus this becomes a crisis. His goal (a crisis goal) is to avert disaster and to preserve his safety. The plan that he selects to achieve this goal is one whereby he will make Antilochus aware of the danger he has caused: Menelaus utters a *protest* (a verbal script).

[26] Schank and Abelson (n. 1), 145.

[27] Ibid., 146.

[28] I use the term 'theme' in this case to refer to the subject matter of the story. Jane Austen, for example, uses life themes as titles, to identify the themes of her novels: *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility*.

[29] See, for example, A. Graesser, M. Singer and T. Trabasso, 'Constructing inferences during narrative text comprehension', *Psychological Review* 101 (1994), 371–95; A. Graesser and V. Ottati, 'Why stories? Some evidence, questions, and challenges', in R. Wyer (ed.), *Knowledge and Memory: The Real Story*, Advances in Social Cognition 8 (Hillsdale, NJ, 1995), 121–32; T. Trabasso and J. Magliano, 'Conscious understanding during comprehension', *Discourse Processes* 21 (1996), 255–87; E.T. Mueller, 'Story understanding', in L. Nadel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*, vol. 4 (London, 2002), 238–46.

epic (in this case, the *Iliad*) in terms of the cognitive entities that Schank and Abelson propose. Second, I shall relate my findings to the oral origins of the tradition, in order to gain further insight into the poet's approach to the task of singing in performance.

CHARACTERIZATION IN THE HOMERIC EPICS: MALCOLM WILLCOCK'S 'THEMES'

I have selected as the focus for a discussion of the composition of character in the *Iliad* the descriptions of the interactions between the Achaean heroes at the funeral games of *Iliad* 23. This long passage has also been examined by Malcolm Willcock, from two perspectives.[30] His concerns are, on the one hand, the function of the games and the method of the poet and, on the other, the figure of Antilochus as he appears both in the games and elsewhere in the *Iliad*, and the related question of tradition and invention. As will become clear, Willcock's insights into Homer's compositional strategies, especially in connection with characterization, interlock very neatly (although at the time he would have been unaware of this) with Schank and Abelson's computer models that predict or simulate human behaviour.[31]

Willcock directs his attention to the principal Achaeans who are brought to the fore in the funeral games that Achilles hosts in memory of Patroclus. He notes that, in this farewell parade of the leading Achaeans, each hero behaves consistently 'in character'.[32] This consistency, he says, contributes to their credibility.[33] And he makes two further observations that are worth noting. First, he suggests that the poet has in mind 'a mental mould' or 'pattern' representing each character.[34] That is, the poet has stored in memory a coherent selection of attributes, or behaviour patterns, for each character.[35] Second, and remarkably, Willcock uses the term 'theme' to describe this 'less precise pattern' that he is proposing: that is, the behaviour pattern that the poet holds in memory for each of his leading characters.[36] Thematic

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[30] See M.M. Willcock, 'The funeral games of Patroclus', *BICS* 20 (1973), 1–11, at 1; and see also idem, 'Antilochus in the *Iliad*', in E. Delebecque, *Mélanges Edouard Delebecque* (Aix-en-Provence, 1983), 477–85.

[31] It is an extraordinary coincidence that Willcock was formulating his thoughts only a year or so before Schank and Abelson began working on cognitive models that could account for, predict or simulate behaviour on the basis of knowledge about goals, plans and themes.

[32] On the funeral games as a farewell event (a 'curtain call'), see also O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the* Iliad (Oxford, 1992), 253. In Homer, Willcock notes, behaviour is an expression of character: Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 3. This is not a new observation: see Arist. *Poet.* 1450a1.

[33] Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 3. On consistency, see also Willcock 1983 (n. 30), 480–1. As Fränkel observes, 'consistency makes the figures monumental': see H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, tr. M. Hadas and J. Willis (Oxford, 1975), 85. And see below.

[34] Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 3.

[35] Willcock's analysis of character in Homeric epic has been echoed by Malcolm Heath in his study of characterization in tragedy: M. Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (London, 1989). He too argues that individuality is achieved by 'a few basic traits, clearly and consistently delineated' (119). My discussion below will refine Willcock's and Heath's analyses. For further discussion of characterization in tragedy in particular, see C. Pelling, 'Conclusion', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1990), 245–62, esp. at 245–7.

[36] Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 3. He is careful to distinguish this less precise theme from the 'precise' (his word) themes, the structural units of song, identified by Parry and Lord.

patterning of thought, he argues, parallels the formulaic patterning of Homeric language; and he gives recognizability as the reason.[37] Willcock's intuitions about character and composition are significant – especially in the light of the cognitive theory that I have set out above.[38]

When Willcock proposes character 'themes' he is not taking us back to reductive character 'types', the function of traditional story-patterns;[39] nor, on the other hand, is he claiming that Homer created rich and detailed portraits.[40] His focus is elsewhere. He is concerned with the connections between what the poet holds in memory (a 'pattern' or 'theme' for each character) and the action he describes. And, ultimately, he proposes a solution to the problem of the origins of these 'patterns' or 'themes': he contemplates an interaction between tradition and contamination (where the action and character-moulds of one story influence the action and character-moulds of another).[41]

In Willcock's hypothesis about Homeric practice we find a rough but productive parallel to ideas from cognitive science. Action, according to Schank and Abelson, has its origins in goals and plans. The goals and plans of any one actor may be traced back to a consistent selection of themes: role themes, interpersonal themes and life themes (that is, the social role of each character, his relationships with others and his own perspective on the world). Thus, the consistent portrayal of Homer's characters (the sum of their themes) should ensure that we, as members of the audience, are always able to predict, or at least to recognise the logic of, their behaviour. The story that Homer tells (the action sequence itself) should therefore be comprehensible, authentic (in that it is believable and consistent) and satisfying.

I propose now to take a small sample of Homer's heroes and examine the character of each. Like Willcock I shall focus on their behaviour in the course of the chariot race of *Iliad* 23. Whereas Willcock was concerned ultimately with external influences on the poet (where the 'mental mould' came from), my concern will be the poet himself and the way in which he used the apparatus of memory in the process of composition. I shall analyse the heroes' behaviour in terms of

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[37] Willcock 1983 (n. 30), 480: the hearer or reader 'finds the actions appropriate precisely because the people involved are recognisable'. I have no argument with this conclusion – from the audience's point of view. On the other hand, I observe that the elements common to both formulaic speech patterns and systematic patterns of character construction are not only *recognizability* but also *efficiency*. We are always trying to find more efficient ways of storing (and subsequently accessing) material in memory – especially in contexts in which the written word is unavailable.

[38] At this point of each of Willcock's two papers – 1973 (n. 30), 5, and 1983 (n. 30), 482 – he turns from aspects of the mechanics of composition (aspects that are of interest to me) onto another path: a broader consideration of external influence and the relation of these characters and these scenes to other poems in the epic cycle – the *Aethiopis*, in particular.

[39] See Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 6. For a brief account of 'reductive' traditional patterns see L. Collins, *Studies in Characterization in the* Iliad (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1988), 14–15. A.B. Lord reads character as what follows from function in a given plot: for an excellent example, see Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA, 2000²), 158–85. See also B. Powell, *Composition by Theme in the* Odyssey (Meisenheim am Glam, 1977) *passim*; G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore, MD, 1970), who sees Achilles and Odysseus as opposing character types (see 45–9, 317–23).

[40] For discussion of neoanalyst scholars who see in Homer a poet capable of many subtleties of characterization, see Collins (n. 39), 15–16.

[41] Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 8–9. This is not an unreasonable conclusion; but it is not a proposal that I intend to pursue in this article.

the entities that Schank and Abelson have proposed: themes, goals and plans. On this evidence I shall form conclusions about the knowledge structures on which the poet is drawing. That is, I shall be probing the poet's memory in a systematic way to locate the 'mental mould' – the concept of character that he has adopted for each of these first-rank heroes – and the way in which the poet organizes this information in memory for ready access. This, therefore, is not a study of character; rather, it is an exploration of the storage systems of memory, and a study of their application, using the behaviour of a number of actors as a test.

Homer's characters are all, to some extent, traditional. As a poet who worked in a particular song-tradition, he inherited for every character a bundle of information. This information had been woven into the traditional stories that he encountered: the stories themselves (their sequences of action) held this information together – and ensured its memorability. The question must now be addressed: can a traditional character also be to any degree 'rounded'? In the past, arguments have been mounted that Homer's characters are no more than stereotypes.[42] Sceptical views from the last century can be traced back to two sources: first, Bruno Snell, who claimed that the Greeks did not view the body as a unit and that Homer could not conceive of the individual;[43] and, second, the early advocates of the oral traditional origins of the Homeric epics, of whom Geoffrey Kirk is an example. Kirk claimed that the technique and aims of oral composition were incompatible with the depiction of distinctive rounded characters.[44] As Christopher Gill has demonstrated, however, Snell's argument that Homer did not perceive man as an organic whole but as an aggregate of parts is not entirely applicable to the enterprise of distinguishing between different personalities in a story such as the *Iliad*. And, as a counter to Kirk's argument, Richard Martin has shown convincingly that Homer's characters are distinctive in the way they speak.[45] We must accept, therefore, that Homer's characters are to some extent individualized.[46] The question of the extent to which this is so lies beyond the scope of this article. For an oral poet, the limits of memory may in some degree restrict the richness of characterization.[47]

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[42] For what are generally older and more sceptical views about characterization see the brief and useful commentary by A. Lardinois, 'Characterization through *gnomai* in Homer's *Iliad*', *Mnemosyne* 53 (2000), 641–61, at 641–2.

[43] B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought* (Oxford, 1953), 6–7. For a useful summary of Snell's thinking on the individual, see C. Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford, 1996), 30–41.

[44] G. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962), 265.

[45] R. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the* Iliad (Ithaca, NY, 1989), esp. 89–145, 146–205.

[46] For discussion of the difference between the Homeric character and the truly individualized character, see G. Messing, 'On weighing Achilles' winged words', *Language* 57 (1981), 888–900, at 891–3. Although in my conclusion I shall return to the question of complexity, I shall not set out to claim that Homer was able to individualize his characters in the modern sense of the word, including the quirks of behaviour and tiny contradictions that we expect to find in characters in literature of our own times.

[47] In the past I have cited the important study by George Miller on the limited capacity of memory for handling processing tasks, 'The magical number seven, plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information', *Psychological Review* 63 (1956), 81–97. A more recent paper, N. Cowan, 'The magical number 4 in short-term memory: a reconsideration of mental storage capacity', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 24 (2001), 87–114, suggests in fact (with support from several others) a smaller capacity limit for *the focus of attention*. That is, in a poem that is unambiguously oral *or* in a poem that is orally derived (that still shows oral

For my purposes 'character' amounts to a set of personal traits and attitudes identified with any one individual. This set of traits and attitudes generates in turn particular behavioural and verbal patterns; these patterns will be consistently observable in that one individual (some of these patterns – but not all of them – may be applied to others, but a unique combination of patterns will distinguish one character from another).

THE FUNERAL GAMES FOR PATROCLUS (*IL.* 23.257–897)

The competitors in the funeral games will be Patroclus' former companions, that small supporting cast of heroes whom we have come to know in earlier episodes of the *Iliad* story. In parading his cast of characters at this point of the narrative, the poet shows us these individuals behaving entirely in character, as I have noted.[48] As we shall see, the predictability of each hero's temperament is essential to the success of the episode. The narrative at this point derives its interest from the novel situation offered by the games – from the problems that arise when the Achaean heroes are now pitted against each other in competition for the same prizes.

It is because so many of the leading characters are brought together at this point, within a single span of text, that I have selected this episode for closer study. The funeral games are also an appropriate focus for discussion because from this vantage point we can look back across the narrative as a whole and assess the consistency of Homer's portrayal.[49] I have selected for my trial Diomedes, Antilochus, Menelaus and Achilles.[50]

Diomedes

Diomedes is, on the face of it, an uncomplicated hero.[51] He is energetic, resourceful and successful. He takes part in two contests in the funeral games: the chariot race (262–652), which he wins outright, and the fight in armour (798–825), in which there is no result (but in which Achilles gives him the special prize).

To use Schank and Abelson's terminology, our knowledge about Diomedes' character is the sum of the themes that we associate with him. Most of these we have deduced from his behaviour in the earlier episodes of the poem. Diomedes' role theme is that of *basileus*; we expect him, as a leader of men, to be a strong and brilliant warrior on the battlefield.[52] Indeed, Homer has cast Diomedes as sur-

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traditional characteristics: it is composed *as though in performance*) we should find evidence that the poet cannot focus on more than a few chunks of information at any one time.

[48] And see Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 3.

[49] We find a discussion of the scripts that realize the events of the chariot race of *Il.* 23 in Minchin (n. 3), 48–70.

[50] For some discussion also of Ajax, see the notes below. For a summary of the findings in this section of the article, see Table 1 at the end.

[51] As Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 3, notes, Diomedes does not share with Achilles a predilection for self-questioning; and Taplin (n. 32), 135, sums him up neatly: 'He seems to enjoy a charmed immunity to real, deep suffering'.

[52] For the Trojans' view of the son of Tydeus, see 6.96–8, 8.161–2. The role theme *basileus* implies excellence in fighting, in particular; it also includes a certain ethical outlook, in terms of duties and responsibilities to φίλοι and to the community, as well as expectations of recognition and honour *from* φίλοι and the community. Cf. Collins (n. 39), 19–24.

rogate for Achilles during his self-imposed absence from the battlefield.[53] And he is young (age-status is a role theme), as he himself is careful to stress (14.112): youth in Homer is generally associated with naïveté, impetuosity and a certain rashness.[54] Diomedes, as we shall see below, both confirms and challenges our expectations. This is what makes him interesting as a character.

Diomedes' interpersonal themes – those, at least, that are important in this episode – are a good relationship with Athena and (temporarily) a hostile relationship with Apollo.[55] Although this theme is not relevant to this particular episode it is also the case that Diomedes has a working relationship with Agamemnon (by contrast with Achilles' relationship with his leader). When Agamemnon dresses Diomedes down in the course of the *epipolesis*, Diomedes submits to his commander's reproach: he wisely refrains from responding to Agamemnon's charges (4.401–2, 413–4) and promptly makes the effort to prove him wrong (419–21).[56] But, when it comes to major tactical issues, Diomedes is prepared to differ from his leader (9.32–49, 14.110–32) – in a robust but also prudent fashion, not inconsistent with his response in *Il.* 4. The hero's life themes – those themes that describe an individual's personal qualities, his or her general moral and ethical outlook, expectations of life and ambitions – are, quite simply, that he is very competitive (perhaps more so than any other *basileus* except Achilles); he has (as we have seen) a measured approach to personal relationships, he is concerned about his honour and his enduring reputation, and – this is Diomedes' defining quality – although he may not win every contest that he enters, in his own eyes *he never loses*.[57]

The chariot race of *Iliad* 23, as a contest, awakens in Diomedes the usual goal: to win. As the race moves into its last leg (373–4), Diomedes' horses have moved close up behind Eumelus' chariot (377–81). The plan that he has selected for achieving his goal – an obvious one, to overtake – is activated. But Apollo, who is partial to Eumelus, strikes the whip from Diomedes' hand. The hero sheds tears of frustration (appropriately, given his role themes and his life themes) as he sees Eumelus' horses surging ahead (385–7). Athena steps in to support him. She returns the whip to him and, in a rage, goes after Eumelus. She smashes

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[53] Note that Diomedes does not reappear in the fighting in the *Iliad* after Book 11: his role as surrogate for Achilles is drawing to a close.

[54] We think also of the impetuosity of Antilochus (see below); and the occasional naïveté, impetuosity and rashness of Telemachus in the *Odyssey*: on Telemachus see especially S. Murnaghan, *Disguise and Recognition in the* Odyssey (Princeton, NJ, 1987), 33: 'Telemachus is not fully himself when the story opens'.

[55] See 23.382–4; see also *Il.* 5 *passim* (on Athena's favour). For the reason for Apollo's opposition in the chariot race, see 2.763–7 (Apollo had bred Eumelus' horses). We must remember that the gods, too, have character-moulds: they too have role themes, interpersonal themes and life themes. One of Athena's role themes (and this may also spill over into affection for particular individuals such as Diomedes and Odysseus – an interpersonal theme) is that she is a supporter of the Achaeans; one of Apollo's is that he is a supporter of the Trojans.

[56] Diomedes' zest for battle is sustained into the action of *Il.* 5 (and see 5.1 ff., and 252–73 in particular).

[57] Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 3, claims that Diomedes is a natural winner. It is more correct to say, as I note above, that *he never loses*. For Diomedes' successful performances, see, for example, his *aristeia*, 5.1–863; his performance at 11.313–67; even his exchange of armour with Glaucus, 6.232–6. Diomedes retreats occasionally (e.g. at 5.596–606), but we are to consider this to be a strategic withdrawal not a loss. His wounding in the foot by Paris (11.369–83) indeed takes him out of the fighting. But in Diomedes' eyes this does not count as a defeat. He would have beaten Paris if they had been engaged in hand-to-hand combat (11.385–95), he says: for Diomedes an arrow wound does not count.

his chariot and hurls him aside. He is out of the race. And Diomedes speeds on, untroubled, to win (398–9, 499–513).

In the second of these contests, the fight in armour, Diomedes is pitted against Ajax, in every respect a formidable opponent. Both heroes, of course, aim to win, the prize being Sarpedon's armour (for them to share) and an additional silver-studded sword for the hero who first penetrates his opponent's armour (802–10). It is a tough and closely contested fight. But the outcome, from the spectators' point of view, is inevitable. Just as Diomedes' role and life themes cast him as a strong attacker, Ajax's role theme dictates that he is a strong defender, a warrior *who never wins*.[58] Ajax lands a blow on Diomedes' shield, but does not pierce it (816–19); Diomedes has his eye on Ajax's neck and threatens to wound him (820–1).[59] At this moment the spectators call a halt to proceedings (822–3). This, after all, is a contest, not a battle. The people ask that the prizes be divided equally (823). But Diomedes at this point has the upper hand. So Achilles awards him the special prize of the sword and the sword belt (824–5). And Ajax is, again, the runner-up.[60]

Antilochus

Nestor's son is one of the competitors in the chariot race, the first event of the games. His horses, his father has reminded him (309–10), are the slowest in the field. But he has youth and good horsemanship on his side (306–8). In the course of the race Antilochus becomes engaged in a tussle with Menelaus. After the contest between Diomedes and Eumelus has been aborted, with the smashing of Eumelus' chariot, it is this second 'duel' that holds our attention.

Let us discuss Antilochus in terms of the knowledge structures that we have stored in memory. I begin with his themes. The role themes that relate to Nestor's son are, first, his status as a hero, and second, his age-status as a young man (νέον περ ἐόντα, 23.306). As for interpersonal themes, he is the son of Nestor (a relationship that Homer exploits in the epics), he also has an affinity with Menelaus and he has a good relationship with Achilles – both these relationships are important to our understanding of this episode.[61] As for life themes, like all heroes he is competitive

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[58] Ajax cannot be a winner because he has no links with a well-disposed god (as do Diomedes, Odysseus or Achilles): cf. Sophocles, *Ajax* 127–33, 766–75. He is a self-made man, but one who lacks the brilliance that makes a winner (Willcock 1973 [n. 30], 4, notes this also). Ajax enters for three events in the funeral games, more than any other hero. And he comes second in each. In the throwing of the weight, he is second to Polypoetes (830–49). In the fight in armour against Diomedes, the fight is called off, as I have noted, with the individual prize going to Diomedes. And in the wrestling match, against Odysseus, it is Odysseus who brings Ajax down (700–37). But Achilles stops the match at this point and decrees that the prizes must be shared. After all the effort that Ajax has invested in the games, he does not have the glory of winning a single event. This is consistent with his status throughout the *Iliad*: at 2.768–70 he is declared to be the best fighter *after* Achilles.

[59] αἰὲν ἐπ' αὐχένι κῦρε φαεινοῦ δουρὸς ἀκωκῇ ('he was always menacing the neck of Ajax with the point of the shining spear', 821).

[60] There is more to be said about Ajax – one of Homer's most interesting characters. His reputation is as a defender, but he is also a strong speaker: his contribution to the Embassy (9.624–42) makes a powerful impact on Achilles. On his role as a man of sensible counsel, see M. Edwards, *The* Iliad: *A Commentary*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, 1991), 123–4, 125.

[61] It is in *Il*. 5 that we first become aware of Antilochus' concern for Menelaus, as he takes up a protective stance beside him. For his relationship with Menelaus, see 5.561–75 (he saves

and concerned about status and honour; but what distinguishes Antilochus is that he is also remarkably opportunistic, a quality that Homer seems to associate – as we do – with the fearless lack of caution of youth.[62] And, like his father, he is sociable; this young man is socially adept to an exceptional degree.[63]

It is not surprising that Antilochus' highest goal, as he begins the chariot race, is to do well. As the race develops, and as Eumelus and Diomedes take the lead, Antilochus finds himself behind Menelaus. The young man knows that he will not win this race outright; but it would satisfy him if he could defeat a rival of merit, Menelaus (403–9).[64] This is his revised goal and to achieve it he appeals to his horses (403, 407–9). But this first plan, expressed through exhortation, is unsuccessful. He therefore modifies his plan and threatens his horses (409–14).[65] Antilochus' horses respond to his words; and they move right up close to Menelaus' team. They have now reached the stretch of ground where the course is waterlogged (418–24). Antilochus takes a quick diversion off-track. But as he moves back to the track itself, Menelaus becomes anxious about the possibility of a collision (425).[66] He calls to Antilochus, warning him to hold back his horses (426–8).[67] But Antilochus drives on all the harder, whipping up his horses, as though he had never heard his rival's shouts (429–30).

It is surprising, even shocking, that Antilochus should act as he does.[68] We know of his previous protective attitude towards Menelaus. But in the context of

Menelaus' life); 576–89 (he works with Menelaus to kill Pylaemenes and Mydon and take their horses); 15.568–91 (he responds to a suggestion of Menelaus and kills Melanippus); 17.679–93 (Menelaus finds Antilochus and asks him to tell Achilles the news about Patroclus' death). On Antilochus' relationship with Achilles, see below; and see also Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 7–8; Willcock 1983 (n. 30), 481. The choice of Antilochus as the person to break the news of Patroclus' death to Achilles is a clear pointer to their friendship.

[62] On the impetuousness of youth see especially Menelaus' comment at 3.108–10. For four further instances of Antilochus' quick reactions and opportunism (his ability to turn any event to his advantage), see 4.457–62 (when conflict resumes after the truce it is Antilochus who is the first to kill); at 5.576–89 he seizes the horses of Pylaemenes; at 13.384–401 he seizes the horses of Asius; and at 13.545–51 he strips the armour of Thoön. M. Willcock, 'Menelaus in the *Iliad*', in M. Reichel and A. Rengakos (edd.), *Epea Pteroenta: Beiträge zur Homerforschung* (Stuttgart, 2002), 221–9, at 222–3, observes that in Homer first impressions are lasting ones (this applies to all the heroes and their appearances in the epic) and that when Homer repeats a motif, a piece of information about a particular character, he intends it to be read as 'significant and true' (223). This is so in Antilochus' case. It is also so for Menelaus, as we shall see below.

[63] It is the request that Ajax passes to Menelaus (17.652–5) that first makes us aware that this impulsive hero, Antilochus, has particular interpersonal skills. This is memorably confirmed in the scene in which he breaks the news of Patroclus' death to Achilles (18.1–34). As we shall see below, Antilochus' readiness during the funeral games to challenge Menelaus (but to make concessions as soon as he sees that he has put friendship at risk) indicates that he understands what it is that those about him are feeling; and he knows just how far he can go.

[64] For his urgent instructions see, e.g., ἔμβητον καὶ σφῶϊ τιταίνετον ὅττι τάχιστα ('Come on you! Pull as fast as you can!', 403).

[65] ὧδε γὰρ ἐξερέω, καὶ μὴν τετελεσμένον ἔσται ('… for I will tell you this and it will be a thing accomplished', 410).

[66] This is how Richardson makes sense of the situation: see N. Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1993), 217–18.

[67] Ἀντίλοχ', ἀφραδέως ἱππάζεαι· ἀλλ' ἄνεχ' ἵππους ('Antilochus, this is reckless horsemanship. Hold back your horses!', 426).

[68] As Richardson (n. 66), 218, points out, he is *pretending* not to hear. The only other occasion on which a hero apparently fails to heed another is when Odysseus does not hear (οὐδ' ἐσάκουσε) Diomedes' urgent request for support (8.97–8). The discussion of this latter moment in both ancient and modern commentaries points to the gravity with which Odysseus' apparent

the chariot race we must conclude that his immediate achievement goal, to defeat Menelaus, has for the moment completely blocked his warm feelings towards the older man. We should understand Antilochus' behaviour in these closing stages of the race as the outcome of youthful zeal for pre-eminence – deriving from the life themes we attribute to him.[69] It will be Antilochus who takes second prize after Diomedes, having defeated Menelaus not through the speed of his horses (οὔ τι τάχει γε, 515) but by his characteristic quick thinking and his ability to capitalize on his opponent's caution (κέρδεσιν, 515).[70]

But there is a further challenge to overcome. Achilles, the host of the games, awards the second prize (the mare) to Eumelus, the best charioteer, although he finished last (536–8). Antilochus feels that he has been robbed; he is angry (543–54).[71] A newly formed preservation goal drives him to speak out. He protests (this is his plan), proposing that he will fight anyone who tries to take his prize from him. Achilles responds positively (555–62), with a smile (μείδησεν, 555); he agrees to give a special prize to Eumelus. Antilochus may claim the mare. And now it is Menelaus who is angry (566–7), as he sees Antilochus with second prize. In an attempt to preserve his honour he challenges the award, asking Antilochus to swear that he did not cause interference during the race (570–85). Antilochus now has to respond to a further preservation goal: to re-establish good relations with the older man. He achieves his goal through conciliatory words (indeed, Homer describes him at this point as πεπνυμένος ['astute', 586]), pleading the rashness of youth, and through prompt action (587–95). He leads the mare over to Menelaus and gives her to him (596–7).[72] But, predictably, he has neither apologized nor conceded that the mare was not rightly his (he refers to ἵππον … τὴν ἀρόμην, 'the mare which I won', 591–2).[73] Thus Antilochus through his quick wits and his intuitive social skills manages to achieve two apparently conflicting goals: the satisfaction of doing well in the race (by finishing in second place) and, by giving up his second prize, of appeasing the very man whom he defeated. He has a remarkable ability to turn any setback to his advantage. Indeed, the mare will be restored to him.[74] The sum of his themes, the goals and plans that emerge from them, and his script-based actions ensures that Antilochus is, as Willcock puts it,

non-cooperation is regarded. Scholars are more ready to conclude that 8.97–98 is an interpolation than to accept that a hero might behave in such a way: see G. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1990), 306. In the light of this, Antilochus' behaviour is quite remarkable.

[69] Note how precedence rules operate for Antilochus *at this point*: an achievement goal (which must be addressed right away) takes precedence over preservation of a friendship (which can be patched up later).

[70] Antilochus is confident that Menelaus will be cautious; therefore he can afford to be daring (indeed, as his father had recommended [at 23.313–18]: see Taplin [n. 32], 256).

[71] ὦ Ἀχιλεῦ, μάλα τοι κεχολώσομαι ('Achilles, I shall be very angry with you', 543).

[72] Antilochus' readiness to appease someone greater than himself is a fine moment in the narrative: for sympathetic discussion see Richardson (n. 66), 233–4. Pelling (n. 35), 247, comments that figures in Greek tragedy are very poor at empathetic understanding. Perhaps we see more of this kind of empathy in Homer: the gods, for example, can, if they choose, be empathetic (Iris and Hermes with Priam in *Il.* 24, for instance); and, among mortals, Antilochus is a pleasing example of a person who can read other people's needs. Achilles, too, displays this capacity: on this see below.

[73] Antilochus' generosity does not extend so far as to diminish his honour (he still claims that he has taken second place, ahead of Menelaus).

[74] On this, see Richardson (n. 66), 257; R. Scodel, *Epic Facework: Self-presentation and Social Interaction in Homer* (Swansea, 2008), 103–6.

a 'personable and attractive' young man.[75] This judgement is indeed confirmed a
little later as the footrace event comes to a close (785–97). Although Antilochus
loses to Odysseus (and, apparently, also to Ajax son of Oileus), he is, despite his
competitive nature, able to smile (786). His speech is light-hearted: he recognizes
in Odysseus someone who uses μῆτις to compensate for the disadvantages of age
and is prepared to acknowledge the superiority of the tactic over his own speed.
Antilochus expresses goodwill to Odysseus, who defeated him; and in the same
speech pays a neat compliment to Achilles (792), who rewards him generously.

Menelaus

Let us now turn to Antilochus' opponent. Agamemnon's brother is racing in third
place with his pair of fine horses – one, Aethe, lent by Agamemnon, and his
own, Podargus (293–300). When Antilochus observes ahead a narrow stretch of
the course (418–24) he adopts a risky strategy. Menelaus is afraid (ἔδεισε, 425):
he foresees an accident should the two chariots collide on this stretch of the
track. His immediate plan is to protest, and to urge that Antilochus should rein in
his horses. But, when Antilochus takes no notice, Menelaus himself is obliged to
hold in his horses and to give ground to Antilochus. In anger at being exposed
to danger he then threatens the young man: Antilochus will have to take an oath
if he is to claim the prize (439–41).[76] And Menelaus urges on his horses, who
nearly catch Antilochus again. But it is Antilochus who finishes in second place,
with Menelaus behind.

I shall now examine Menelaus' character more thoroughly, looking first at the
themes that we associate with him. Menelaus' role themes are those of *basileus*,
an older man (by age-status) and brother of the leader; he is also, by tradition,
the wronged husband, a theme that plays no major role in this episode.[77] The
interpersonal themes that are relevant in this episode are his close and dependent
relationship with his brother (who lent him the horse)[78] and a warm relationship,
across age boundaries, with Antilochus, who has on one occasion even saved
his life (in the aborted contest with Aeneas, at 5.565–72). As for Menelaus' life
themes, we have observed in the earlier narrative (at 7. 94–102) the competitive
mind-set and the concern for honour that we associate also with his role theme
as a *basileus*. These are the themes that lead a hero to step forward boldly, to

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[75] Willcock 1973 (n. 30), 1. See also Redfield on Antilochus' social intelligence: J. Redfield,
Nature and Culture in the Iliad*: the Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago, IL, 1975), 209 ('Antilochus
is having a good games, but his success is as much political as athletic').

[76] Note the introductory verb: νεικέων ('reproaching [him]', 438).

[77] Homer, however, alludes to Menelaus' loss and his attempt to avenge it through his continu-
ing need for Agamemnon's support in his day-to-day life (and see next note).

[78] The fact that Menelaus has borrowed a horse from his brother gives us an indication
of good relations with, and a certain dependence on, Agamemnon: this is a reference to an
interpersonal theme (Menelaus/Agamemnon; Agamemnon/Menelaus) that the poet has invoked
at other points of the poem. We see the theme first at 4.148–82, Agamemnon's distress at
the wounds suffered by his brother (he feels responsible for him); second at 6.53–60, with
Agamemnon's hasty intervention (ἀντίος ἦλθε θέων, 54) to urge Menelaus to act differently,
Menelaus' ready capitulation (61–2) and the joint action of the brothers (62–5); third, with
Agamemnon's oversight of Menelaus at 7.104–19 and Menelaus' prompt obedience at 120–1;
fourth, in Agamemnon's defence of Menelaus (10.120–7) when Nestor criticizes him (10.114–18);
and, finally, in Agamemnon's silent hope that Menelaus will not be chosen for the night-time
expedition (10.227–40).

offer himself for battle action, so that he may preserve his honour and achieve renown.[79] In Menelaus' case, concern for honour goes beyond the personal to a wider concern for the honour and the safety of his fellow Achaeans: at 5.561–72 he moves into battle to avenge the deaths of Orsilochus and Crethon; at 7.96–8 he responds to Hector's challenge to single combat; at 10.25–8 he cannot sleep because of his concern for the Achaeans who had come to Troy for his sake; and, at 17.580–1, he succeeds, as Willcock argues, in recovering the body of Patroclus.[80]

But in Menelaus' case we note a distinguishing theme that I shall term 'vulnerability': Antilochus recognizes it and, fearing for him, he moves in to stand alongside (5.565–7); Agamemnon sees it when he pulls him out of the contest with Hector (fearing for him, at 7.104–19); and Menelaus himself recognizes it in himself at 17.91–105 (when, notably, he decides to fetch Ajax to help him on the battlefield)[81] and at 23.426–8 (when he fears for his own well-being and, unheroically, makes a decision to retreat). Menelaus is also sensitive: he is aware of the consequences of his own actions.[82]

One of the interesting aspects of the character of Menelaus is that his role theme as *basileus* and his competitive life theme occasionally conflict with other distinguishing life themes (lack of confidence and vulnerability). When Menelaus senses danger, the goal of self-preservation is naturally stronger than any goals generated by his competitive life theme. But when he sees the danger diminishing his competitive goal resurfaces. So let us return to the chariot race. Menelaus' primary goal, whether at other points of the *Iliad*-story or here in *Iliad* 23 is to do well – or, at least, as well as he can, for he is realistic about his abilities on the battlefield.[83] This goal is suspended when Antilochus puts his own and Menelaus' safety at risk. The crisis goal of self-preservation takes precedence over all else (433–7). When that is fulfilled, when Menelaus pulls back his horses, a revised goal is instantiated. This new goal is to prevent Antilochus from coming in ahead of him and from claiming a superior prize (439–41): hence Menelaus' dual plans,

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[79] It is interesting to note that the Homeric epithets for Menelaus firmly assert his warlike nature: he is ἀρήϊος ('warlike', e.g. at 3.339, 11.487, 15.540) and ἀρηΐφιλος ('devoted to Ares'/'loved by Ares', e.g. at 3.52, 17.1).

[80] This is Menelaus' *aristeia*: see Willcock (n. 62), 229.

[81] In this case the poet uses a traditional motif (the internal debate) in an unexpected way. Menelaus is one of four heroes in the epic – Odysseus at 11.403, Menelaus at 17.90, Agenor at 21.552, Hector at 22.98 – who debate with themselves whether to retreat or to stand firm. Menelaus, however, is the only hero who decides to withdraw. The monologue, marked by a typical expression (ὀχθήσας δ᾽ ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὅν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν), explains the actions of the heroes according to their own motives (on this see B. Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the* Iliad*: Studies in the Narrative Techniques of Homeric Battle Description* [Wiesbaden, 1968], 96–8). Willcock (n. 62), 221, notes that, although Menelaus is generally portrayed as heroic, he lacks self-confidence. This lack of confidence must explain his decision here.

[82] For example, Menelaus appears to be aware that he himself has played a role in Patroclus' death on the battlefield: on this see 17.138–9. For excellent observations on this aspect of Menelaus, see Edwards (n. 60), 62 and 76.

[83] On the realist in Menelaus, recall how readily (7.120–2) he withdrew his offer to take the field against Hector, when Agamemnon urged him to do so, given that Hector was so much the better man. Menelaus had volunteered to face Hector only after a long silence (ὀψὲ δὲ δή, 94). He was clearly reluctant: what drove him to offer himself was not confidence in his abilities but shame at the apparent cowardice of his peers (96–100). In the chariot race of *Il.* 23 I cannot imagine that Menelaus thought that he would defeat Diomedes (or Eumelus, for that matter). But it is clear from subsequent events that he had clearly hoped to do better than he did. It was a victory over Antilochus that was his goal.

to threaten Antilochus with a challenge and to spur on his horses to overtake his rival. The second of these plans is not fulfilled, as we have seen: Menelaus finishes in third place. But he does revert to his first plan, and in his anger he challenges Antilochus to take an oath that he did not use guile to obstruct his chariot (566–85). Menelaus' anger arises from his desire to protect his honour, from the thwarting of his ambition and from being exposed to danger unnecessarily.[84] He rebukes Antilochus (570–2); and Antilochus, as we noted above, in his desire to maintain good relations with Menelaus, returns the mare to his hands.

When Antilochus so disarmingly gives up his prize without dispute (587–97), Menelaus finds that his goal has been achieved. A new preservation goal, to re-establish good relations, is instantiated, generated by his latent good relations with Antilochus. He says that he is prepared to forego the prize, although he, like Antilochus, continues to defend his honour and insists that he won it (ἵππον … ἐμήν περ ἐοῦσαν, 'although it is my mare', 609–10). He will give it up, he says, in recognition of what Antilochus and his family have done for him (607–8). And, in his role as an elder, he gives the young man a warning about his behaviour. With this delightful reconciliation, which has required a readiness from both men to make concessions, Menelaus fades from the *Iliad*.

Achilles

Achilles does not participate in the events of the funeral games. He is instead the convenor, the master of ceremonies and the final arbiter in matters of dispute. The presentation of his character is somewhat muted here: in Macleod's words he is 'courteous and dispassionate'.[85] As he now calmly and with good humour adjudicates the disputes of others we contrast his behaviour with the violence of his quarrel with Agamemnon in *Il.* 1 and the extremity of his acts of grief and vengeance, especially in *Il.* 21 and 22.

Turning now to Achilles' character-mould, I begin with the role theme as *basileus* that, of course, he shares with other heroes of the poem.[86] What distinguishes Achilles, however, are the qualities that operate as life themes: first, his semi-divinity, a theme that inevitably colours his relationship with his world;[87] second, his mistrust of the values unthinkingly endorsed by his colleagues;[88] and third, the

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[84] Tam Camden-Dunne, in a paper at ANU's Homer Seminar IV in 2007, identified Menelaus' characteristic resistance to what is unfair. Menelaus can tolerate being beaten by someone better than himself (Diomedes) but he objects to being cheated of his prize (by Antilochus). We see a similar reaction at 3.449–54.

[85] C. Macleod (ed.), *Iliad XXIV* (Cambridge, 1982), 30; see also S. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's* Iliad (Berkeley, CA, 1984), 156, who speaks of 'a controlled, detached sociability'. I am aware that this brief discussion of Achilles' character will not do him justice, but I have tried at least to cover the important aspects of character that relate to our understanding of the actions and events of the funeral games.

[86] Linked closely to this role theme is the life theme of intense competitiveness, which, as we have seen, is common to almost all the heroes.

[87] This life theme (closely linked to an interpersonal theme that reflects the close and sympathetic relationship with his mother, Thetis) allows him to find extraordinary solutions to any problem he faces: he can appeal to his goddess-mother, who in turn has access to Zeus. On Achilles' appeals to his mother, see L. Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the* Iliad (Berkeley, CA, 1991), 17–20, 59–61, 63–5, 102.

[88] Note his scorn for Agamemnon in *Il.* 1 (at 122–9, 149–71, 225–44) and for Odysseus *and* Agamemnon in *Il.* 9 (at 308–429). He has no respect for these individuals and the values that they represent.

instability of his temperament, which can move in the blink of an eye from noble magnanimity to an excess of irascibility and even cruelty.[89] Achilles is, to put it simply, different from the others.

Achilles is not the only hero who knows that he will die at Troy – Euchenor, for example, is another, at 13.663–72. In Achilles' case, however, this knowledge, in interaction with his life themes, endows him with an emotional and ethical intensity that is expressed in higher expectations of himself and of the world around him; this in turn causes him to be more concerned than any other *basileus* about the honour and respect due to him. And yet, as Zanker observes, Achilles does not respond in a typically 'heroic' way to the materialistic honour-centred incentives that the heroic code has to offer:[90] he can brush aside the offer that the Embassy carries to him from Agamemnon in *Il.* 9; and he is impatient of the gift offer that Agamemnon tries to force on him at 19.146–53. In this respect he is unlike Agamemnon, who is preoccupied with material rewards. This is why Achilles is so easily stirred to anger at the assembly of *Il.* 1; and it is why he challenges his leader. The fact that gifts of themselves do not have the power to distract Achilles from his current concern, whether it is unforgiving anger (in *Il.* 9) or a violent desire for revenge (in *Il.* 19), leads us to identify yet another distinctive life theme – resolution.[91]

As for Achilles' interpersonal themes, we identify good relations with some of his comrades and fractured relations with others. But his relationships are atypical. Unlike Diomedes (who resembles him in so many ways)[92] he has a generally tense relationship with his leader Agamemnon; there seems to be no sympathy between him and Odysseus (who, like Achilles, seems to be one of the principal leaders of the Achaean force).[93] On the other hand, he has good relations with other Achaeans, especially Patroclus, Ajax son of Telamon, and Antilochus; and, remarkably, Achilles entertains as a friend and takes as confidant the old king Priam – the enemy of the Achaeans.

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[89] And see below for a further life theme. We see a good example of Achilles' harshness in *Il.* 1, where he moves quickly from the role of a rational and reasonable leader to a sharp and acerbic critic: compare the statesmanlike Achilles at 1.59–67 and his insinuations against his leader at 1.85–91. And see also *Il.* 24.649–52, where Achilles speaks sarcastically to Priam. He begins in a cantankerously challenging fashion (650) but his tone is suddenly neutralized by the kindly address term that follows (γέρον φίλε, 650); his momentary aggression has faded. There is much scholarly discussion of the difficulties posed by this latter scene: see most recently A. Gottesman, 'The pragmatics of Homeric *kertomia*', *CQ* 58 (2008), 1–12, who comments on the aggressive nature of such talk.

[90] G. Zanker, *The Heart of Achilles: Characterization and Personal Ethics in the* Iliad (Ann Arbor, MI, 1994), 127–8. Of course, gifts are at the heart of the quarrel in *Il.* 1; but what Achilles is concerned about is not the gifts themselves but gifts *as a measure of honour*.

[91] Resolution is what keeps Achilles so focussed. Resolution also enables him to withdraw so completely from the fighting (and his vocation as a *basileus*), to the extent that he sets himself an enjoyment goal (9.186–90), and keeps him from weakening when Phoenix and Ajax separately appeal to him, after he has rejected Agamemnon's gift offer. When Achilles has returned to the fighting in *Il.* 19 it is his resolution (to return promptly to the fighting, an achievement goal) that leads him to reject Odysseus' proposal (19.155–72) that the forces eat (a satisfaction goal) before fighting. For Achilles his achievement goal takes precedence over all else.

[92] Diomedes resembles Achilles in being young, extremely competitive and with (often) the same god-inspired drive. As we have noted above, Diomedes occupies precisely those parts of the text from which Achilles is absent. Clearly the poet, too, saw Diomedes as an Achilles-substitute – the outcome of the chariot race confirms this.

[93] See esp. 9.308–13 (to Odysseus) and 19.199–205 (addressed to Agamemnon, but directed at Odysseus).

As for Achilles' actions and words at the funeral games, we see him first as convenor, as he announces each competition. Note that as he announces the first event, the chariot race, he explains that if the event were held in someone else's honour he would compete and win – an important expression of a preservation goal, to establish his supremacy despite the outcome of the race, which will be won (in Achilles' absence) by Diomedes. Second, he maintains order: he is concerned that respect be shown to his friend (a further preservation goal). At 492–8, for example, he firmly rebukes Ajax son of Oileus and Idomeneus for their undignified dispute about the positions of the horses as the race is run. Finally we have the allocation of prizes (the gifts that will serve as reminders of Patroclus into the future). As the prizes are collected by the contestants, Achilles pities poor Eumelus (534), who was hampered by Athena's intervention. He gives him second prize – the prize that Antilochus had earned on the race-track. Here we see an instance of Achillean empathy and fairness (further life themes): Eumelus would have expected to win, therefore Achilles respects him and rewards him.[94]

Antilochus, as we have seen, challenges Achilles' decision. And Achilles at 556, χαίρων Ἀντιλόχῳ (favouring Antilochus), smiles at him and agrees to restore the mare to him; and he will give another prize from his store to Eumelos. An echo, in some respects, of this scene is to be found at 23.785–97, discussed above. Achilles acknowledges Antilochus' compliment, and his charm, with a further gift of a half-talent. He is as able to reciprocate good-will as readily as he reciprocates hard feelings.

All the contestants have received their prizes. One prize remains. This, in a spontaneous and magnanimous gesture, Achilles offers to old Nestor, in recognition of and out of respect for both the contributions he has made in the past and the limitations of his age. Achilles' words at 618–23 are dignified in their simplicity.[95] And they once again point to his capacity for empathy and respect – particularly for someone of the same age as his father. Achilles' concern for his old father (an interpersonal theme) is transferred to another old man, Nestor, and foreshadows his gentleness towards Priam, when he comes to the hero's shelter to ransom his son.[96]

The final competition is the spear-throwing contest. Agamemnon and Meriones rise up to compete (886–8), but Achilles awards the prize of the cauldron immediately to the king and urges Agamemnon to give the other prize, the spear, to Meriones. His words at 890–1 appear to be sincere:[97]

> Ἀτρεΐδη· ἴδμεν γὰρ ὅσον προβέβηκας ἁπάντων
> ἠδ' ὅσσον δυνάμει τε καὶ ἥμασιν ἔπλευ ἄριστος ...

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[94] On Achilles' readiness to acknowledge his respect for another, see 6.416–20 (Eëtion); 23.618–23 (Nestor); and 24.480–4, 631–2 (Priam). Achillean empathy is also observable in *Il.* 24: see 582–6 (with Priam in mind).

[95] Richardson (n. 66), 236.

[96] I read this as the fulfilment of a preservation goal: Achilles is affirming his respect and affection for Nestor – he values his friendship. See also Scodel (n. 74), 39–40.

[97] Achilles is on the whole plain-spoken; if he wishes to criticize he will do it openly. As he says in another context, at 9.312–3: ἐχθρὸς γάρ μοι κεῖνος ὁμῶς Ἀΐδαο πύλῃσιν ὅς χ' ἕτερον μὲν κεύθῃ ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ εἴπῃ ('I detest that man who hides one thing in his heart but says another'). For further discussion see Scodel (n. 74), 153–7, esp. 157 ('Achilles does not want Agamemnon to lose face').

> Son of Atreus, for we know how much you surpass all others,
> by how much you are greatest for strength among the spear-throwers …

Thus, as he repairs his relationship with Agamemnon (fulfilling a preservation goal), Achilles brings the funeral games to a close.

CONCLUSIONS

Knowledge, Schank and Abelson claim, is stored in memory in organized form. We rely on our store of scripts for understanding or performing routine actions or action-sequences in the world around us. We draw on plans to assist us in dealing with situations that require more than a routine response. Plans are strategies for the fulfilment of a person's goals. We can predict the kinds of goals that a person might have if we understand something of his or her themes: that is, the background information that identifies the range of roles he or she plays in society; his or her interpersonal relations; and his or her personal qualities, attitudes and ambitions. This systematic organization of knowledge allows every one of us to operate efficiently in the everyday world. Such a system also enables the production (and comprehension) of narrative. And, to return to our specific case, it enables poets working in, or close to, an oral tradition to compose a rich and engaging song. Whether we are members of an audience, working to comprehend a complex story such as the *Iliad*, or whether we are the poets who compose such songs, we draw on these four categories of knowledge – or something very similar – to help us in our task. Schank and Abelson's account of cognitive processes, which recognizes the hierarchical organization of memory, provides us with a hypothesis that can be productively tested against the evidence of Homer.

The characters that I have examined are Achaean heroes. They have much in common: a role theme (the status of *basileus*), some interpersonal themes (friendship bonds with comrades) and some life themes (competitiveness and concern for personal honour). One might think, with Fränkel, that these characters are stereotypes. But this is not the case. Homer's characters are not at all one-dimensional. He has found the means to shape each one around the conflicts of goals and the failures of plans that are recognizable in life – and that make stories interesting. When we examine the themes of Homer's heroes we notice that each of those whom I have selected for study has a number of characteristics in common with the others – and a number of *particular* characteristics (that is, individual themes) that distinguish him from the rest. It is this blend of themes that are common to all heroes with distinctive themes that will generate in many cases *similar goals* in the Achaean heroes but *individualized plans*; and these individualized plans result in different patterns of behaviour. So – to consider at this point only those individual themes that are prominent in the funeral games for Patroclus – we observe that Diomedes' role theme (like that of all the heroes) is that he is a *basileus*; an interpersonal theme gives him Athena as a protecting deity; a life theme identifies him as a striving competitor. Thus he is (almost) always successful. Antilochus' distinguishing role theme is his youth (the impulsive and opportunistic nature of his behaviour testifies to his speedy reactions to all kinds of situations); a life theme is his social intelligence: he knows how to achieve reconciliation with Menelaus and a prize from Achilles. Among Menelaus' life themes are vulnerability and a

lack of self-confidence. These themes characterize much of his behaviour during the chariot race, although other themes come into play in its aftermath. That is, a finite number of themes will individualize each hero and render him interesting;[98] some themes may be prominent in some episodes, but not in others.[99] The poet turns this simple formula to advantage. He makes careful choices about who is to interact with whom. Note how he is able to create a complex conflict between the nimble, quick-witted Antilochus and the slower, more cautious Menelaus in the chariot race – and resolve it by drawing on a second set of qualities in each of the heroes.

On the basis of this small sample of Achaean heroes we are beginning to gain some insight into the construction of character in traditional song. The poet has stored in memory the themes and the likely goals and plans that are appropriate for each of his actors. The evidence of the characters he creates – whom we recognize each time we meet them – indicates that he made systematic use of such 'packages' of knowledge, hierarchically organized, for each character.[100] Each package, or 'mental mould', as Willcock described it, would have slowly taken shape within the tradition and would have been transmitted through story and song. In these forms such packages are both memorable and, consequently, readily accessible to a poet. Having been transmitted perhaps for generations, each package has been tried and tested for internal consistency (that is, it will generate a believable individual who behaves 'in character' unfailingly, in all situations). Thus we have found in Homer's *Iliad* evidence of an *organized*, *knowledge-based procedure* that explains how a poet who worked in this tradition could make efficient use of the structures of memory, as Schank and Abelson have described them, to bring to life the significant characters in his tale.[101]

The Australian National University   ELIZABETH MINCHIN
                                                  elizabeth.minchin@anu.edu.au

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[98] Those heroes who do not have distinguishing characteristics do not stay in our memory: Hypsenor, for example, who plays a role at 5.76 and 13.411, is characterless; Leonteus (despite appearances at 2.745, 12.130; 188; 23.837, 841) is a shadowy presence. Even Meriones, who has a minor speaking part in the epic, does not have a strong identity. This in itself is interesting, because the poet uses some very old language to describe him (see M. West, 'Homer's meter', in I. Morris and B. Powell, *A New Companion to Homer* [Leiden, 1997], 218–37, at 234). The formulaic line 7.166=8.264=17.259 hints at a story that is not developed in Homer's version of the tale of Troy. The poet has refrained from deploying in his narrative a bundle of Meriones material that must have been circulating as a traditional character-mould.

[99] That is, some themes are not necessary to the action of the funeral games (e.g. Diomedes' prudent approach to relationships [a life theme]; Menelaus' role as betrayed husband [a role theme]), but they nevertheless add dimension to the character at all times.

[100] Would Homer, for example, have been aware of these structures of memory? No more than the average person today. But if one had asked him whether he could sing a variant of the chariot race, in which Antilochus might have yielded to Menelaus' protest and pulled back, the poet would have said he could not do so. It is not that the story itself will not allow this but that the information that he has about Antilochus' character (his themes, plans and goals) would not permit it. Such a variant would not be consistent with his character-mould.

[101] This is not to say that a storyteller working in a literate tradition does not do the same thing. Clearly, they do. But such storytellers are able to use writing – instead of relying entirely on memory – to record information about character and patterns of behaviour. Their memories do not assume the entire burden of composition.

TABLE 1: The poet's 'mental moulds' (a selection of Homer's characters analysed by theme)[a]

Diomedes

role themes:	*basileus*
	young man
	substitute for Achilles
interpersonal themes:	Athena (good relationship)
	Apollo (hostile)
	Nestor (good relationship)
	Agamemnon (working relationship)
life themes:	competitive
	concerned about honour
	never loses
	pragmatic approach to personal relationships

Antilochus

role themes:	*basileus*
	young man
interpersonal themes:	son of Nestor
	Menelaus (good relations)
	Achilles (good relations)
life themes:	competitive
	concerned about honour
	opportunistic
	socially adept: intuitive

Menelaus

role themes:	*basileus*
	older man
	(wronged husband)
interpersonal themes:	Agamemnon (supportive brother)
	Antilochus (supportive friendship)
life themes:	competitive
	concerned for honour (for self and people)
	vulnerability
	aware of his weaknesses
	sensitivity

Achilles

role themes:	*basileus* (high status)
	son of goddess
	host of funeral games for Patroclus
interpersonal themes:	Thetis (a resource)
	Patroclus (love)
	Antilochus (affection)
	Peleus and men like Peleus (respect)
	Agamemnon (a fragile relationship)
	Athena, Hera, Zeus (he has their favour)
life themes:	competitive
	concerned for honour, respect, friendship
	little interest in material gain
	resolution
	quick temperament
	empathy
	magnanimity
	capacity for violence

[a]The character-moulds described here are the moulds that emerge from the events of the funeral games for Patroclus.