

# The role of poets and the place of poetry in ancient greece essay

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When it comes to Homer's Iliad one of the earliest instances where poetry and poets was mentioned can be found in Book 2 where Homer wrote the following:

And now, O Muses, dwellers in the mansions of Olympus, tell me- or you are goddesses and are in all places so that you see all things, while we know nothing but by report ... as for the common soldiers, they were so that I could not name every single one of them though I had ten tongues, and though my voice failed not and my heart were of bronze within me, unless you, O Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Jove, were to recount them to me (Homer 2).

It is very clear in this passage that Homer deferred to the Muse to help him recount what he knew. He said that his memory failed him and that he has no ability to say the things that needed to be spoken or written down.

It is well-known that ancient poets like Homer acknowledge their dependence on the Muse for inspiration but in this passage he did not say that they inspire him he said that they were his source of information. This means to say that the Muse in the context of the Iliad is the source of inspiration.

The Muse is the giver of gifts and in this case it is the gift to create words that are melodious to the ear but at the same time the power to move the hearts and minds of men. This is the power of the poet, Homer acknowledges this but he was right to show humility and instead he deflected honor back to the gods.

It can also be argued that Homer's remarks was not all about modesty. He has another goal and it is to put a stamp of authority on what he has to say. Homer invoked the help of the muse and in the process established a way to validate what he was trying to say.

In other words he did not put his own stamp of approval on his masterpiece, he was saying that it was the Muse who told him what to say. He could have easily said that he was the one who thought of these things but it would not have the same impact as when he said that the words came from the Muse.

In Ancient Greece the poet is therefore not a mere artist trying to express himself, he is also a builder of society.

This is like nation-building but instead of talking about revolutionaries, heroes and martyrs who died for the sake of freedom, poets like Homer created an identity for a people that are yet without permanent institutions (Haubold 162).

This means that in reality Homer did receive assistance but not from the gods. Part of his inspiration comes from fellow poets, those who came before him. Homer relied on other poets like him, to glean from them information that was handed down from generation to generation.

According to one commentary, " In Homer's invocations these goddesses are a complex personification of the poet's indebtedness to his tradition, but at the same time they cover over another important relationship that defines the poet, that to other poets" (Ford 90).

In other words the poets of Ancient Greece is a repository of information that anyone can access in order to understand the world that they live in.

The opening lines of Hesiod's *Works and Days* provides an indirect explanation as to the roles of poets in Ancient Greece. The line says: " Muses of Pieria who give glory through song, come hither, tell of Zeus your father and chant his praise.

Through him mortal men are famed or un-famed, sung or unsung alike, as great Zeus wills" (Hesiod 1) It says that a poet has the power to immortalize men.

This means that in Ancient Greece the poets play an important role they are not only messengers but they are some kind of special communication and through their gift of speech and their ability to make music through their rhymes and songs gives them the ability to enhance or downgrade the image of a person.

It is through the work of poets that men of stature are celebrated in songs and declarations.

Just like Homer, Hesiod is a poet who benefitted from other poets who came before him (Athanasakis 59). But Hesiod did not only use the art of poetry to become the historian and the preserver of legacies. He used poetry to speak to the social problems that he and his fellowmen faced in Ancient Greece.

In the case of Hesiod he was able to talk about a family problem more openly and with more passion than if he was plainly speaking as an average person and not someone with the authority to speak like a god.

For instance many believed that when Hesiod wrote the Works and Days he was also in a real life struggle with his brother (Frazer 5).

Therefore the lines that says, “ Perses, lay up these things in your heart, and do not let that Strife who delights in mischief hold your heart back from work, while you peep and peer and listen to the wrangles of the court-house” is not just a simple statement (Hesiod 25). Hidden within this phrase is a commentary on what he felt about his personal problems.

Another purpose of poetry and poets is to be used as a tool to explain beginnings and origins. In Hesiod’s work the poet said, “ Or if you will, I will sum you up another tale well and skilfully — and do you lay it up in your heart, — how the gods and mortal men sprang from one source” (Hesiod 106-108).

The poets provide answers to some of the toughest questions on earth. Questions about origins and the source of problems can be readily answered with information that can be gleaned from listening to what these ancient poets had to say.

Therefore, poetry is a medium of communication, a powerful tool that can influence the way people think about a person, an event or even a place.

What is Troy without Homer's Iliad? Who would have known about the mighty deeds of Achilles if not for the poetry of Homer?

Poets has the ability to compose lines that are so rich with information that by simply declaring these words the audience can see and feel the past and then gain an insight into their traditions and their identity as a people. This is why poets and their poetry play an important role in a social context.

Poetry and poets play an important role in the evolution of ancient societies. Poets are powerful communicators. They enhance their reputation by claiming that these abilities are not innate but given by the gods. The poet is a historian, commentator, and artist rolled into one.

They have the power to make a person famous and at the same time they have this ability to create a link between the past and the present. They are able to accomplish all of these through their interesting narratives and their powerful and well-crafted poetry that can move the hearts and minds of their listeners.

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