‘The power of hope to bring change is limitless.’
Compare the way the two texts explore this idea.

Despite their very different settings and contexts, Clint Eastwood’s Hollywood epic Invictus, and David Malouf’s reimagining of Homer’s Iliad Ransom provide a clear insight into the power of hope to bring about change. Malouf and Eastwood depict societies that are governed by tradition, to where both Troy and South Africa remain divided as a result of past animosity. Despite this however, leaders emerge that are able to defile the conventions of “what is expected” and subsequently, embrace “something new” and unexpected. Through the texts’ depiction of “break[ing] the knot” and “look[ing] to the future”, both authors are able to emphasise the power of emotional strength, all the while suggesting that change is achieved through great personal cost.

Despite the role of tradition, both texts suggest that the power to change is limitless. In Malouf’s Ransom, Priam exists as a “ceremonial figure” and relies primarily on long-held traditions and emotional abstinence to exert his leadership, as showcased through his unfamiliarity to the many “deprivations and shortages” of the agrarian lifestyle. Additionally, prior to his journey to “ransom” Hector’s body from Achilles, Priam concedes that his “attention was fixed always on what was central. Himself”. As a result, his lack of exposure to the real world has left him crippled of life’s simplest experiences, so much so that Malouf employs Jove’s eagle, a bird famous for its key sight as a means of alluding to the King’s utter blindness in regards to humanity. As a result, Priam’s notion of breaking away from tradition and abdicating his “royal image” in order to petition for Hector’s body, is initially berated by Hecuba and his royal council, as it transgresses the boundaries of convention, allowing Malouf to further accentuate the rote of Priam’s actions. Nevertheless, despite his “new and unheard of” plan, Priam immerses himself into the common life and strips away any “form of royal insignia”, thus enabling the king to emerge as “a man remade” and briefly, relinquish the disunion between Greeks and Trojans.

Similarly, Eastwood’s Invictus showcases Nelson Mandela as adopting the same ideology of “exceeding [one’s] own expectations” and trying “something new” and unheard of. Prior to his presidency, the Afrikaners triumphed in all aspects of political, social and economic life, as demonstrated in the first onset, which captures a wide shot of two opposing fields; one stripped bare, while the other appears luscious and immaculate, thus representing the current gulf between blacks and whites. This is further typified through Mandela’s black bodyguards, who remain ambivalent towards the “Special Branch cop”, as captured by their initial encounter, to where both groups adopt confrontational postures with their respective parties clamouring behind them. Regardless of this however, Mandela uses his position to force a societal change, surprising his “new partners in democracy...with compassion”. As a result, he is able to break “the cycle of fear” and unite South Africa through rugby. This stark contrast with Malouf’s Priam accentuates that, while the role of tradition prevents the king from rectifying society, Eastwood’s Mandela succeeds at breaking this notion, ultimately suggesting that the power to change is limitless.

Despite the trappings of society, both texts suggest that the power to achieve
hope ultimately prevails through emotional strength. Set in a time of absolute monarchy, “King Priam” is frequently denied the opportunity to engage in “ordinary desires” and as a consequence remains sheltered from anything outside his “royal sphere”. Despite this, however, Priam’s obstinate determination to “ransom” the body of his son enables him to muster the courage and embrace the concept of “chance”, a motif that is considered revolutionary in the face of “what it [could] lead to, the violence”. Regardless, despite the resistance bore by his royal council, further emphasising the tie to convention as showcased through Eastwood’s Brenda, Priam’s ability to “entreat the killer of his son” and accept Achilles’ hand accents that it takes great emotional strength to “break the knot”, and bring about change. Dissimilarly, the “most unpredictable of the Greeks”, Achilles “breaks every rule [that a Trojan warrior has] been taught to live by” through his gratuitous violence performed towards Hector’s body. This is further exemplified through Malouf’s employment of animal imagery, to where Hecuba, in a state of fury, describes Achilles as a “jackal [and al] wolf”, thus allowing the text to illustrate the “fighter’s” primal emotions in their rawest form. As a result, despite Achilles’ desire to be “rocked and comforted” by his mother, his reputation as a “fighter” permits him from “betray[ing] to others what he [really feels], to the point where he is he denied the pleasures of company and eats only “out of obligation”. Contrastingly, Eastwood’s Mandela remains imbued with the desire to create a shared identity under the “one team one nation” banner, and hence, continues to jettison his strong oppositions belief that “[the] country [has gone] to the dogs”. Seemingly impervious to pain, Mandela is not only able to “come out ready to forgive the people who put [him in prison]”, but continue to deprecate the idea of “petty revenge”, mirroring Malouf’s firm belief that retaliation is never the answer. Likewise, this profound strength inspires Pienaar to “be the master of [his] fate”, and, through his use of inclusive language, he is able to coax his teammates to “be better than they think they can be”, thereby suggesting that change is always obtainable through great strength and unwavering courage.

Both texts, however, suggest that, while change is obtainable, it does come at a great personal cost. In Ransom, Priam’s reputation as an “imposing figure” denies him the opportunity to form a personal bond with his “offspring” and, as a result, he remains “saved” from true mourning after the death of Hector, as compared to Hecuba, who “sits stunned with grief”. This is further exemplified through Priam’s interaction with Somax, to where, when the “cart man” sniffs, the King describes it as an “odd habit”, demonstrating Priam’s lack of insight in regards to true loss. In addition, his regal life has left him incredibly isolated from the “real world” to where he “takes no part in the physical business” and rather, lives vicariously through his “herald Ideaus”. Furthermore, Malouf’s employment of childish traits, to where Priam is characterized as an “obedient toddler”, is contrasted with his “old and frail age”, thereby allowing the text to typify the King’s lack of exposure to life’s simplest experiences. Nevertheless, Somax’s tenderness towards his family propels Priam to ruminate on the true extent of his relationships, to where, by the end of the text, he makes “small sounds” and regains his role as a father. This is contrasted to Eastwood’s Mandela who remains isolated from his children. Like Priam, Invictus’ President Mandela is committed to his “very big family [of forty-two million people]”, and,
as a consequence, he is denied the opportunity to embrace fatherhood. This is further established through Eastwood’s arrangement of Zindzi, to where she remains framed by the doorway as she exits the living room, thus demonstrating her absence in Mandela’s life. Likewise, the story of Winnie Mandela is limited to a single artifact, the bracelet, seemingly abandoned in a drawer and later discarded by her daughter. As a result, despite Mandela’s attempt to share his life with her, it is unsurprisingly met with great animosity, signifying her reluctance to forgive her father and ultimately, preventing the President from acquiring a relationship with his family.

Both Ransom and Invictus allude to the power of change to achieve unity and subsequently, surpass convention. While the role of tradition seemingly hinders the texts’ ability to achieve coherence, both leaders develop a precocious talent for “trying something new and unimaginable”. Despite the personal losses suffered by both Priam and Mandela, ultimately, the texts’ suggest that hope acts as an essential element to attaining unity and embracing the “unthinkable”.