

Achille's emotions



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Spring 13 Spring 13 University of Miami University of Miami Midtem #1/ENG 201-N Anchita Sanan #1. Discuss the character of Achilles in Homer's Iliad. What is the nature of the existential crisis in which he finds himself, and why is his relationship to both gods and the other Greek warriors so unusual? What realization does he arrive at during his period of withdrawal from the battlefield? What does it mean to say that he is probably the first true individual as well as the first "problem character," in Western literature? Finally, discuss the reader's response to his behavior.

In what ways does Achilles repel our human sympathies? In what ways does he maintain or regain them? In this context you will certainly want to discuss his behavior toward Hector as well as his final meeting with Priam. Midtem #1/ENG 201-N Anchita Sanan #1. Discuss the character of Achilles in Homer's Iliad. What is the nature of the existential crisis in which he finds himself, and why is his relationship to both gods and the other Greek warriors so unusual? What realization does he arrive at during his period of withdrawal from the battlefield?

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In Homer's Iliad, one of the main characters, Achilles, is especially prone to these emotions. His emotions vary from one extreme to the other. Despite being considered to be one of the strongest warriors, a figure feared by the Trojans, Achilles isn't as perfect as he appears to be. He is a man who is ruled more often by his emotions than he is by his brain. His emotions blind him to an extent and make his actions appear to be less than noble and portray him as a man with close to no integrity. The son of the King of Gods, Zeus, and the Nymph Thetis, Achilles is flawed deeply.

In Book I, Agamemnon and Achilles quarrel with one another after Achilles suggests that Agamemnon return "bright eyed" Chryseis to her father in order to appease Apollo and to consequently halt the plague that is raining upon them. Enraged by Achilles suggestion, Agamemnon agrees to return the girl to her father, on the condition that he get another prize to replace the girl. Achilles argues that there are no gifts that are left to pass around, that once they pillage another town, they will compensate Agamemnon three times as much. This leads to an argument between the two men, with accusations flying around.

Agamemnon perceives Achilles suggestion as a way for Achilles to obtain more gifts, and demands a gift of equal, if not more, value in return. Sharp-tongued Achilles retaliates, calling Agamemnon an "insatiable creature," claiming that he has done nothing to offend the Trojans and yet here he is, taking part in a war that has nothing to do with him but everything to do with Agamemnon and Menelaus. "When we Achaeans loot some well-built Trojan town, my prizes never match the ones you get. The major share of war's fury rests on me. But when we hand around the battle spoils, you get much larger

trophies. Already there is a seed that has been planted within Achilles' heart, a seed that will bear bitterness and anger as its fruit. In his anger, Achilles' steps away from the war, taking himself completely out of the course of it, with plans to return to his home. Upon hearing this, Agamemnon threatens to take away Briseis, the woman that was given to Achilles. So overcome by his anger is Achilles that he debates ending Agamemnon's life right there and then. While he is debating, Athena, who discourages him from continuing with his plan of murder, consoling Achilles that he will be richer than Agamemnon, visits him.

Achilles retaliates with even harsher words to Agamemnon once Athena disappears, calling him a coward who sits behind the scenes whilst his men fight and die for him and vows to not take any part in the war from this point forth, for he has been scorned by the wordings of Agamemnon. When the men of Agamemnon come to take Briseis, Achilles gives her up without a fight, despite how heavy his heart is at the thought of losing her. Once she is gone, Achilles withdraws from his companions and sobs, praying to his mother to understand why he is treated the way he is, why he isn't treated with respect.

His mother, hearing his laments, comes to console him, telling him that she will visit Zeus and try to sway him towards helping the Trojans and destroying the Achaeans, to make them pay for disrespecting the son of Thetis. This is just one of the many examples of how Achilles is ruled by his emotions, of how him being the son of Zeus and Thetis aids him in his goals and gives him an upper hand. He is favored not only by Athena, but

also by Hera, and indirectly by Zeus, who tries to maintain neutrality throughout the course of the Iliad.

There are various occasions on which the Gods interfere, each trying to help either the Trojans or the Achaeans. On more than one occasion, Thetis interferes on behalf of her son, trying to gain him some ground by calling in the favors that she has accrued. The first occasion on which she interferes is when she visits Zeus and tells him to give the Trojans a helping hand so that the Achaeans will suffer and see how they suffer without Achilles' presence. She convinces Zeus and even though the Trojans march ahead, Achilles pays a heavy price for his request. He loses his best friend, the person he is closest to, Patroclus.

Thetis interferes again, when Achilles decides to join the war and avenge the death of Patroclus, and get his body back. She gives Hephaestus a visit and requests him to make her son a new armor. Hephaestus forges for Achilles a breastplate, a helmet and a shield that has images of dancing children, constellations etc. without asking any further questions. Despite being the son of two gods, Achilles is made painfully aware of the short amount of time he has left. His mother constantly reminds him that regardless of which path he takes; his time on Earth is limited.

He can either go back to his home and die peacefully or he can join the war and die there. Other occasions on which the Gods favor Achilles is when Iris, sent by Hera, tells Achilles that he must go back to war, that his appearance will discourage the Trojans and cause them to leave behind the body of Patroclus. The same night that Achilles decides to step back into the war, Athena robs the Trojans of their wisdom, causing Hector to reject the idea of

retreating back into the safety of their city, instead, he insists on fighting more.

It seems as if the Gods are changing how the war takes place, very well knowing what the outcome will be, by aiding Achilles. Even though the Trojans too, are favored, the scale seems to be tipped more towards Achilles, perhaps due to the fact that both his parents are Gods. This makes his relationship to the God's quite unique. For the brief period of time that Achilles isn't on the battlefield, he comes to the realization that despite the fact that the war has nothing to do with him, he is still the most feared figure on the battlefield. Achilles is the man that Hector fears, along with the rest of the Trojan army.

Were it not for his quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles would be fighting alongside his men, conquering the battlefield. Achilles is considered to be a true individual because despite being portrayed as one of the bravest warriors, he is still flawed. Flawed in the sense that he feels every emotion to an extreme. He does what he feels is the right thing to do and on more than one occasion, contemplates disobeying the orders that have been given to him. Achilles feels that his skills amongst the other warriors aren't appreciated and that he isn't given the due he deserves, nor the spoils.

His quarrels with Agamemnon prevent him from taking part in the war. He is scorned by the words of Agamemnon and his own beliefs of unjust treatment. He knows that if he doesn't take part in the war, his men will lose the battle, yet he steps away. When the girl, Briseis, is taken from him, he mourns and seeks consolation as to why he is being put down and disrespected by his fellow warriors. He cannot fathom why, despite his

accomplishments and his status amongst his own men, he isn't respected. The seeds of bitterness have taken root in his heart and continue to grow, filling him with despair and anger.

Furthermore, when Patroclus is killed, he seems to almost disintegrate by the grief he feels for his loss. He blames himself for letting his pride and arrogance blind him. Perhaps if he had been there, fighting by his friend's side, his dear friend would still be alive. It takes all but a nudge from Hera to push him back into battle and avenge the death of his friend. He is true because he is not a ruthless killing machine; he feels the emotions of love, grief and anger. Yet at the same time, these emotions get in the way and cause him to make decisions that would be otherwise considered careless or unwise.

This is what makes him a true yet problematic individual. The reader's response to the behavior of Achilles varies throughout the text. There are times when the reader feels sympathetic towards him, i. e. when he loses Briseis and Patroclus. However, there are also times when the reader can feel the air of arrogance that radiates from Achilles. Take into account when Priam comes to Achilles to ask for the body of Hector back, so that he can be given a proper burial and be mourned properly by his wife and family amongst other players.

Achilles snaps at Priam after Priam makes a comment, warning Priam to not provoke him. Achilles' persona varies from a vulnerable man to an untouchable man; making the reader's response vary along with this persona. There are also moments when the reader is horrified at the train of Achilles' thoughts. " I wish I had the heart and strength to carve you up and

eat you raw myself for what you've done to me. " This vulgar statement to Hector appalls the reader, making the reader think twice about the kind of man that Achilles is.

Furthermore, after Hector's death, Achilles refuses to turn over the body to the Trojans or to simply leave it there; instead, he chooses to defile the body. He cuts through the tendons behind both feet, threads them with ox-hide thongs and ties them to his chariot, and then commences to drag behind his chariot the body of Hector. He also drags the body of Hector for twelve days, and each and every time, the body doesn't decompose or suffer due to the Gods keeping it that way. It can be argued, whether or not Achilles is given the respect he deserves. There are men that follow him and support his decision to step away from the war.

There are also men that abhor his decision, blatantly telling Achilles that his decision is selfish and will lead to the deaths of his fellow men. Throughout the course of the Iliad, the reader is able to see instances of divine intervention, and times when the heart seems to rule rather than the brain. Achilles is a strong man with a hard exterior. His interior, however, is a tangle of emotions, which lead him to make decisions that are foolish and careless. There are times that divine intervention seems to knock some sense into him, causing him to veer in the correct direction, however briefly that may be.