

The iliad - a reaction paper

Experience, Meaning of Life



A very important part of being a hero is having human qualities, particularly faults and shortcomings. At times these larger-than-life heroes can make very mortal, human mistakes; they are victims of fate and chances as well (Oedipus). At times, these mistakes have grave consequences (death in the most honorable cases). However, it is this element of human imperfection and fate that make heroes, well, heroes. Their ability to overcome and supersede these human follies further establishes their enigma. Therefore, a hero is not a hero unless he has a fault that he must overcome, and it is how he overcomes this fault that makes him memorable and epic. Achilles is an archetypal hero. Firstly, the archetypal hero in my opinion is a metaphor for humanity. The hero represents each individual in the human species in their own quest of life. Achilles simply displays characteristics that are archetypal in the human psyche. Essentially, we do not see Achilles as a mystical being. His mother is a sea nymph goddess and his armor is made from the gods. The purpose of the hero is for the reader to relate to them on their journey, as it should follow the same journey in humans. If we do not see human flaws in Achilles to begin with we cannot sympathize with him. Who would not feel angry about the way in which Agamemnon took Briseis from him? Naturally you'd think of the person in your life. He simply reacts the way in which an average person would — selfish and upset. Killing Hector isn't patriotic or honorable but he is simply outlining the faults in the human species. We are arrogant, we are selfish and we do things that aren't respectful. We do feel grief and would want revenge. When he kills Hector, we sympathize more as we see the pain inflicted into Hector's family (Hector is more of a human like hero so we gravitate towards him). But after Achilles,

giving back the body of Hector, and providing him proper funeral rites, we see a different Achilles. The disrespectful Achilles who you've stated (at first) as arrogant and 'villain' has now had an epiphany. He sees life as something that's valuable. People care for others lives and he realizes this. He grasps life and has essentially changed as a person. We sympathize with this, as it is archetypal. Subconsciously, humans understand the situation as anybody can relate, no matter age, gender, race, political background or religion- the human psyche is imprinted. Achilles simply represents us. He simply represents the journey in which humans undertake in life to discover that little bit of meaning for them. He shows human flaws and how they are overcome to create a better person. Achilles is a hero as he changes his outlook on that aspect of life.