

Literature review on brutality of war and roles of women in the iliad

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**ASSIGN
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In Homer's *The Iliad*, the Trojan War is shown to be an incredibly brutal and unforgiving war, fought by prideful individuals and leading to the deaths of very close friends. This same brutality is emphasized when the characters give it up for the sake of their own moral code, showing a dramatic level of sympathy and peace during wartime. Furthermore, the women of *The Iliad* provide a dramatic counterpoint to the brash pride of the men, at least where the gods are concerned. The human women of *The Iliad* seem to have little to no autonomy at all.

The brutality of war is shown through the bullish pride of the warrior characters. Achilles is an extremely prideful character - he is superhumanly strong, a fierce warrior, and incredibly aware of how good he is at fighting. As a result, he has a tremendous amount of pride, which often lands him in a lot of trouble. Also, he has a very fragile ego, which makes him lash out in anger and make mistakes when his pride is threatened. For example, when Agamemnon insults him, he is hurt so much by this that he actively leaves his men and prays for their slaughter by the Trojans. Achilles' primary motivation is attention and glory; he wants to prove himself and display his accomplishments to the world.

Achilles' pride makes him shift his priorities in many different directions. For example, after Patroclus dies, leading Achilles to patch things up with Agamemnon, he does not become less filled with rage; instead, he becomes angry at Hector instead. All of this determination to prove himself a man and a warrior is constantly vented through his rage and hate, as he fights more and more in the search for glory. Eventually, he relents once King Priam asks

for Hector's desecrated body back, remembering just how much losing someone can hurt.

This kind of assertiveness is compared unfavorably to the female gods of The Iliad - Athena and Hera, in particular, make spectacular use of their senses of trickery and forcefulness to get things done - like when Athena makes Ares submit to her not once, but twice. However, that being said, the human women of the story are either property of men or wives who interlope and interfere with the men's thought processes. Chryseis is a Trojan priest who has to constantly bargain for what she wants by praying to the gods and offering the Greeks wealth. Briseis is merely a slave to Achilles, and is more a commodity than anything else. Helen does not get much to do in the story, despite being the ostensible reason for the Trojan War in the first place; her presence shows the reader the real character of Paris when he is in private company. Andromache is simply Hector's wife, and does not have a story of her own, just serving to emphasize Hector's love for his country. They have no internal lives to speak of; they just act as counterpoints to existing male characters, who support the story. With its emphasis on war and the lack of strong female characters who are not gods, The Iliad reveals itself to be primarily a man's story, and a story only about men.

Works Cited

Homer. The Iliad.