

Introduction knew him
as a man who
ruthlessly



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Introduction

Under classical mythology, one can define a hero as a courageous individual with great strength, widely known and celebrated by his society for his actions which portray exceptional boldness. In literature, a hero simply means a person with a character that people need to admire or emulate. S/he therefore possesses all the ideals celebrated, valued and articulated by his/her culture. Heroes exist in all fields; for example, in politics, sports, and struggle for freedom among others. Be it in classical mythology, ordinary literature, or any other field, a hero must possess ordinary characteristics that no other person possesses. Since the judgment of heroic deeds lies in the culture that shapes an individual, different cultures value different traits in their heroes.

In literature circles, heroism emanates from both the culture of the author and the culture to which the hero belongs. Heroism not only focuses on the actions of an individual, but also the reasons behind their actions. According to the Greek culture, a hero must be a man with exceptional warrior characteristics; he should stand above other warriors in the society in all aspects; he must not only show warrior characteristics, but should also be intelligent and good in speech; he should endeavor to shun anything that intends to spoil his reputation as a good warrior and finally he should have greater strength and courage than his fellow warriors who should freely acknowledge that he is the best warrior amongst them. These exceptional qualities make him eligible for crowning as a leader.

In the Greek history, a story is told of a man, Achilles, who possessed characteristics that the Greek culture reserved to heroes. A study of the Greek culture and its comparison to Achilles gives an important revelation: Achilles is a classical hero. This essay focuses on Achilles' deeds and how they contributed towards his heroism.

Achilles Heroic Characteristics

Achilles is a swift runner. According to Lowrey, this character of swiftness comes out when " epithets referred to him as a man who was swift footed" (2). Swiftness is an important characteristic for individuals with the desire to excel in war or any other form of physical confrontation. With swiftness, one is able to easily capture or flee from an enemy during war. Besides, such people are able to perform better during competitions aimed at searching for true heroes of a given society. As a result, warriors all over the world cherish this trait and it is through it that Achilles gets crowned as a hero. Besides swiftness, Achilles possesses the characteristics of courage. Courage, as a trait enables an individual to do what the ordinary person cannot do on the grounds that, it has negative possible consequences or evokes fear of injury or death (Anderson, 12).

As a result, one can take up any challenge regardless of any negative impeding consequences of such actions. The spirit of courageousness enabled Achilles to fight his enemies without fear of possible injury or death. This character trait as a courageous man also enabled him to storm out twelve cities of men both by sea through his ships and by land. Honestly, this is not an easy task! No wonder some of his people describe him as a lion-hearted man. According to Redfield, it is Achilles' courage " that made him

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face any body in battle without fear” (39). In some instances, it is evident that people knew him as a man who ruthlessly and courageously tore his opponents in battle. This task cannot be possible for a timid individual; therefore, because of his courageous nature, Achilles passes for a hero.

Achilles’ heroic deeds made people revere him so much that they gave him godly characteristics. They regarded him as a man who commanded fear all over because his actions evoked feelings of fear and terror (Jaeger, 35). This attitude of people towards Achilles portrays him as a special man deserving a special kind of treatment. His ability to break his opponents when at war and his physical superiority over all other warriors paints a picture of someone who elicits fear at his appearance. The fact that all other warriors fear and consider him as the best warrior explains why the society treats him with much reverence; he is a classical hero.

Besides the reverence that people have towards him, Achilles has always been a source of fear before his enemies. This trait has always made him scary before his opponents. One of the goddesses in the Greek culture, goddess Hera reveals that the Trojans, who are rivals to Achilles’ community, tremble at the mention of Achilles. In yet another instance Patroclus refers to Achilles as a man “ who is by far greater than the Achileans” (Lowrey, 2).

As such, Patroclus says that none of the Achileans can surmount any kind of physical challenge to him. Such a statement not only cements the godly character of Achilles, but also confirms people’s belief in him as a man with significant superiority over his peers and opponents where it really matters. Based on these two instances it is quite clear that Achilles is a hero.

The experience that Achilles undergoes while in Combat clearly brings out his heroic characteristics. As Achilles describes his combat experiences, the audience feels how he was “devoted to his people, fighting on their behalf to ensure that they enjoy their lives” (Lowrey, 3). In his explanation, it is evident that Achilles spent so many sleepless nights throughout the time of war. He even loses his own blood during the war on behalf of his people; however, this damaging event or his weariness could not discourage him from fighting for the wellbeing of his people; a true character of a hero. He instead, continues to fight on without any fear of injury or death till the end of the war.

From these actions, it is vivid that Achilles was a man with exceptional character and deserved to be honored as a hero. While in Combat, Achilles also reveals that all his selflessness and determination in war have seen him through difficulties. Selfness as a character trait refers to the ability of an individual to care not only about his own welfare, but also the welfare of others who are bound to benefit from his/her efforts no matter how small they may be. From the way Achilles describes his life during the war, one can tell that he possessed a selfless character.

This selfless character clearly comes out during the war period. Referring to this period, Achilles says that he put “everything aside and struggled with other warriors during the battle only for the sake of the women of his fellow men” (Seamus, 1883). The move by Achilles to consider the wellbeing of women belonging to other men exposes him as somebody who does not think of self gain out of his struggle. In addition, the fact that he is not married at the time of battle further proves that indeed, he is a selfless

character. According to the Greek culture, selflessness is a trait of heroes; therefore, Achilles' selflessness qualifies him to be a classical hero. Besides selflessness, Achilles possesses an enduring character.

Endurance refers to the ability of an individual to persevere pain or suffering with the hope of achieving success in the end of the struggle. Achilles' ability to endure comes out when he talks about the experience he had in Combat during the war time. During this trying period, he says that he spent sleepless nights for many days. This was because of his alertness against potential attack by their opponents and only endurance can help an individual to ward off sleep.

Besides his sleeplessness, Achilles lost his own blood, not mentioning the pain he underwent through when he sustained the bloody injuries. Despite these sufferings in sleeplessness and loss of blood through injury, Achilles continued to fight on for the welfare of his people and in the end, he won the battle. It is this relentless spirit that enabled Achilles to emerge victorious in many wars against their enemies and therefore, his perseverance during war portrays him as a classical hero.

Finally, the case of Achilles and Agamemnon also proves Achilles' heroic characteristics. Achilles' acts of heroism had earlier won him a much coveted prize. It however emerges that Agamemnon tried to take this prize away from Achilles in exchange of expensive gifts; seven strongholds and a daughter of as wife. Conventionally, these attractive offers by Agamemnon would obviously compel Achilles to consider taking the gifts in lieu of the coveted prize. However, to the surprise of many, Achilles handles this

situation in the most rational manner; using his intelligence, he discovers that accepting these gifts would serve to show his acceptance of Agamemnon's superior status; therefore, he refuses to take the gifts and the bride offer and instead decides to protect his higher status of heroism. To Achilles, heroism consists not in the abundance of material things or wives per se, but in character; enduring character. Very few people can readily make such an informed decision.

This intelligent move by Achilles is in line with what the Greece culture expects from heroes like him. Consequently, these adherences to the Greek cultural values that govern heroism help bring out Achilles status as a genuine hero.

Conclusion

Heroism is a highly coveted trait in all the cultures across the continents. Before the relevant authorities crown an individual as a hero, they consider his/her achievements which should be extraordinary. In one such culture, the Greek, heroism is a function of an individual's intelligence, physical appearances, physical capability and his contribution as a warrior in the battlefield. The Greek culture also requires that as a hero, one should always be ready to guard his superior status no matter the consequences or benefits that one would gain by conceding his superiority. Achilles is a classical hero according to the Greek culture mainly because he possesses all the characteristics needed to qualify an individual as a true hero.

Achilles has physical superiority, has outstanding warrior characteristics that his fellow warriors readily acknowledge and he is not ready to relinquish his

superior status; not even with a promise of expensive gifts and a bewitching bride.

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