

Epic heroes

Literature



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1. 0 Introduction

Homer's epic, 'Iliad' depicts the great deeds and adventures of the protagonists, Agamemnon and Achilles. The Greek always believed that the Gods lived on Mt. Olympus and had the powers to do whatever they wanted, and would even intervene with human beings if required. Achilles, the great Greek hero, was the strongest man alive. It is believed that Achilles was so strong that he was almost immortal, except for his heel, considered to be the most vulnerable part of his body.

Agamemnon, the King of Mycenae was on the contrary, was a proud leader. He enjoyed his victories and led his army with valor. Though he was ill-liked by his subjects, they respected him for what he was. Even though Achilles had character flaws seen in men of power and stature, he had enough good qualities to make people adore him. The confrontation between the two giants of the epic revolves around Briseis, the love of Achilles. Agamemnon characterizes the modern world hero. He is ruthless, self-centered, and powerful. Though these traits are analogical to modern day heroism, Agamemnon fights for what he believes is his rightful property.

When the gods request Agamemnon to return Chryseis, he is adamant and demands that Achilles give him Briseis. The character and flaws of these men are brought to the fore in what can be said is a true reflection of heroism of the 21st century. Achilles and Agamemnon exemplify the traits of an epic hero. Comparisons can be done based on three attributes: Extraordinary powers, Confrontation of evil and Areas of vulnerability

2. 0 Analysis

In Book 1, when Achilles asks Agamemnon to return the fair damsel Chryseis, Agamemnon is not taken in by the sweet words of Achilles to return Chryseis to her kingdom. He is a self-centered man, who will do anything to have things his own:

“ Not in this wise, strong as thou art, O godlike Achilles, beguile thou me by craft; thou shalt not outwit me nor persuade me. Dost thou wish, that thou mayest keep thy meed of honour, for me to sit idle in bereavement, and biddest me give her back? (Iliad, Book I, Para 12)

Despite the fact that Achilles was being magnanimous and cared to have Chryseis returned to her kingdom, he was guilty of keeping Briseis. He wanted to be seen as pious and considerate in the eyes of the public and forgot to do the same with Briseis. Agamemnon had seen this and asked for Briseis in return for the surrender of Chryseis.

When Agamemnon sent an embassy to Achilles with gifts, Achilles received the group with open arms. Even after Briseis was robbed from Achilles, he did not attack Agamemnon. He showed restraint and welcomed the group with food and entertainment. He had shown restraint when treated shabbily by Atreides. He was quick to refuse the presents offered by Agamemnon, and said that he would not be a part of the army fighting Agamemnon, and would refrain Hector too:

“ Aias sprung of Zeus, thou son of Telamon, prince of the folk, thou seemest to speak all this almost after mine own mind; but my heart swelleth with wrath as oft as I bethink me of those things, how Atreides entreated me arrogantly among the Argives, as though I were some worthless sojourner.

But go ye and declare my message; I will not take thought of bloody war until that wise Priam`s son, noble Hector, come to the Myrmidons` huts and ships, slaying the Argives, and smirch the ships with fire. But about mine hut and black ship I ween that Hector, though he be very eager for battle, shall be refrained (Book IX, Para 12).

The above paragraph illustrates the magnanimity of Achilles in dealing with people from the enemy camp. He was a true hero in showing restraint and being hospitable to Agamemnon`s men.

In Book XI we see the fighting qualities of Agamemnon. In the war against the Trojans, Agamemnon fought with valor and courage. He led the army well in the war and was seen as a true hero:

Lord Agamemnon son of Atreus followed hard on the Trojans, ever slaying the hindmost man, and they were scattered in flight, and on face or back many of them fell from their chariots beneath the hands of Agamemnon, for mightily he raged with the spear (Book XI, Para. 5).

Agamemnon fought with valor and courage. Despite the wound inflicted on him, Agamemnon fought his way through the ranks of enemy fronts. He led his army against the Trojans and was actively involved in the battle. Again in Book XI we see how the fighting and leadership qualities of the king came to the fore:

But Agamemnon ranged among the ranks of men, with spear, and sword, and great stones for throwing, while yet the blood welled warm from his wound. But when the wound waxed dry, and the blood ceased to flow, then keen pangs came on the might of the son of Atreus. Then leaped he into his

chariot, and bade his charioteer drive to the hollow ships, for he was sore vexed at heart. And he called in a piercing voice, and shouted to the Danaans: " O friends, leaders and counsellors of the Argives, do ye now ward from the seafaring ships the harsh din of battle, for Zeus the counsellor suffers me not all day to war with the Trojans" (Book XI, Para. 10).

When the news of Patroklos' death is brought to Achilles, Achilles is struck in grief and we see the mortal side of a great person. Achilles, despite certain characteristic flaws, was a loved person. He showed how close and loved he was when he sank in grief at the news of Patroklos death:

Thus spake he, and a black cloud of grief enwrapped Achilles, and with both hands he took dark dust and poured it over his head and defiled his comely face, and on his fragrant doublet black ashes fell. And himself in the dust lay mighty and mightily fallen, and with his own hands tore and marred his hair (Book XVIII, Para. 3).

3. 0 Summarization

Iliad shows the way how Greeks worshipped their kings and God. The conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon revolves around a woman. Both Achilles and Agamemnon were heroes in their own right. Achilles was more loved and admired for his kindness and understanding, while Agamemnon was respected for his leadership. Both men had flaws, but these were overcome by their strong individual personalities.

When Achilles refrains from attacking Agamemnon for Briseis, many understand him. Agamemnon on the other hand, is arrogant and most demanding. When Achilles asks Agamemnon to return Chryseis to her land,

he steals Briseis from Achilles camp. The angry Achilles, under the promise of the gods, refrains from attacking Agamemnon. Both men in their own way were representatives of true heroes.

4. 0 Conclusion

Iliad is representative of the way Greeks looked to their God and leadership. While Achilles was depicted as the son of God and held in high esteem, Agamemnon was the aggressor, a powerful man who could and would do anything to get what he thought was legally his own. Achilles, despite certain flaws, was pious and considerate, while Agamemnon was more forceful and commanding.