

Greek and roman heroes

People



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Brianne Keil HUM2210 October 15th, 2012 Interpretation Paper 2: The Warrior Hero We all envision certain types of qualities when considering what defines a hero: strength, agility, rock hard abs, and often, Brad Pitt. But throughout the Greek and Roman literature, we see different types of qualifications in the composition of their heroes. Obviously, both the Greeks and the Romans think that they define a true hero in their versions of Heroic Epics, but which one of these cultures actually proves that they have what makes the ultimate hero?

With some further research into these societies and their literature, we see that their heroes really aren't that different after all. In the Iliad, Homer targets the audience of Greek upper class men in order to spread some cultural propaganda to the nation. Homer captures audiences by using the hero of Achilles to show men what they should aim to be, and to show women what they should be looking for in a man. After the Dark Ages, Homer aims to bring some positive light to the Greeks with his "Epic Heroes", which leads to inspire more than just the Greek men of this time frame.

Homer uses his words to encourage strength, creating what is known as the Greek Heroic Age, dating from 1200 to 750 BC. The Iliad becomes known as the warrior code of personal honor and glory, demonstrating the culture and the qualities Greek men should strive to achieve. Achilles, the epic's hero, is an elegant gentleman who knows his destiny in life is to battle. Achilles makes it a strong point that the aim of every hero is to achieve honor, even if this honor is only reached in death. Achilles knows that he has two fates: to

either live a long life with no fame attributed to him, or to die as a well-known warrior across his land.

Achilles demonstrates to the male audience that honor can only sometimes be reached in battling to the death, an honor that is well worth sacrificing your life. In the Iliad, Achilles states, " Man, supposing you and I, escaping this battle would be able to live on forever, ageless, immortal, so neither would I myself go on fighting in the foremost nor would I urge you into the fighting where men win glory. But now, seeing that the spirits of death stand close about us in their thousands, no man can turn aside nor escape them, let us go on and win glory for ourselves or yield it to others. " This statement proves Achilles deep desire within to reach glory for him, no matter what the cost. Even though Homer's hero can only bestow honor alone, with his own actions, both Achilles and his enemy, Hector, strive to win the approval of the society as well. In a scene of the Iliad, Hector's wife is urging, nearly begging, for him to sustain from battling. Hector replies with, "... yet I would feel deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting. Hector's response demonstrates that not only does he have a duty to fulfill to the Trojans, but also to himself. By denying the fight with Achilles, Hector would be shameful to his society, but more importantly, to his own honor and glory. Homer displays a Greek hero as one with courage, honor, and personal glory that earns fame through the fights they conquer in their life. This description of a hero motivates many Greek men to step up to the plate and battle when the time comes, no matter what their risking along the way.

A Greek Hero must be brave and fearless in the eyes of Homer, which leads to the perception of a hero to Greek citizens as a whole. The Roman's, on the other hand, have a differing view of a hero, thanks to Virgil's writing of the Aeneid. The Aeneid is an Epic History of Rome's first ancestor, Aeneas. The original audience of this piece of literature is the broken and battered Trojans, who at the time (19 AD), were looking for some source of inspiration and identity after being defeated by the Greek. The Aeneid demonstrates Pro-Rome propaganda, giving Romans something to believe in and aspire to be.

It is said that Aeneas is the Hero that leads the Trojans after their defeat to Greece to a new land of prosperity. In the end, Aeneas slays Turnus due to his mission to provide the Roman's with a new land to call " home. " Due to his strong will to complete his mission of reaching security, Aeneas is said to be the military Hero for Rome. Aeneas was " devoted to his mission", and " chose the course heaven gave him", leading to his title as an Epic Hero. Due to the cultural baggage the Trojans have after their humiliating defeat, the Aeneid is a much more emotional piece of literature, with " emotion in his heart", when referring to Aeneas.

Aeneas doesn't just set an example for the Roman's, he is inspirational to the entire population when things seemed to reach rock bottom. " Roman, remember by your strength to rule Earth's peoples-...to pacify, to impose the rule of law, to spare the conquered, battle down the proud. ", Aeneas states in the Aeneid. By the end of the epic, the entire Roman audience feels that they themselves are the glorious conclusion of the story, not just Aeneas. He is idolized as the leader of a new found powerful legacy, in which includes

each and every audience member. So now...the moment we've all been waiting for.

Who takes the crown as the REAL epic hero? Well, it's not that simple of a decision to make, even hundreds of years later. In some ways, the two heroes are very similar. But they also have contrasting qualities that make them unique to their culture. In Greece, the idea of personal honor and glory is highly emphasized, while the Roman Hero Aeneid is all about citizens coming together to reach power and prestige. The differing idealistic characteristics make sense from an outsider's view- the Greek had conquered the Trojans together, but only because of each individual warrior's courage and bravery.

In contrast, the Roman's had just faced an embarrassing defeat, one which left the culture torn apart and most likely, depressed. Aeneid needed to create a positive morale among his people, which could only be restored by bringing everyone together to victory as one. The cultural baggage of each society lead to the way their heroes were presented. Even though the idealistic hero from a Greek society has more selfish attributes, Greek citizens would still appreciate Aeneid's heroic acts, in my opinion.

Whether Aeneid was fighting for his own glory, or for the glory of his people, he still slayed the enemy in order to reach his goal. The Greek audience would still hold Aeneid with high regards because in the end, he did battle for his destiny, and brought the Roman's respect through his actions. Both cultures can appreciate the fact that both Achilles and Aeneid followed their destinies, battled for victory, and in the end, won fame because of their courage and dedication. While these motivations may have been pulled from

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different sources, both men were still able to bring glory upon themselves and the ones they fought for.

Each of them held the true qualities of a warrior hero such as strength, endurance, and daring charisma, keeping them alive today, hundreds of years later. So, I hate to leave you hanging, but I guess the TRUE Epic Hero remains a mystery. After seeing what Achilles and Aeneid went through during battle, how can I choose which one is best? It's so unfair! I think it's safe to say that the Greeks will side with the self-determination of Achilles, while the Roman's appreciate the inspiration Aeneid had to offer to them all.

Either way, both of these men are considered warrior heroes to us all. Works Cited Dunkle, Roger. " The Classical Origins of Western Culture- ILIAD. " Brooklyn College Core Curriculum Series. Brooklyn College, 1986. Web. 14 Oct. 2012. . SparkNotes Editors. " SparkNote on The Aeneid. " SparkNotes. com. SparkNotes LLC. 2002. Web. 2 Oct. 2012.