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The Natures of Monsters and Heroes

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The Natures of Monsters and Heroes

Abstract

Around the late eighth or early seventh century B.C., a poet, known to later ages as Homer, composed two epic poems that tell the tales of the Trojan War, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. *The Iliad* tells the story of the rage of Achilles, the great Greek warrior, while *The Odyssey* tells the story of the coming home of Odysseus, the King of Ithaca, from the Trojan War. A study of both epics reveals that constructs portraying various values, such as the characteristics of heroes, have remained the same from the times of ancient Greece to the present day. However, modern interpretations of ancient Greek epics also portray new/ altered constructs of values in their creation of heroes, such as equality. The topics of fate, mortality, and religion in the epics are reviewed and debated. The character of Achilles, as to whether or not he is a true hero, is also subject to debate. Homer's epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* argue that heroes possess the qualities of pride, selflessness, glory, and bravery; both text and film adaptations of these original works exhibit the same characteristic of heroes, while the monsters of these ancient Greek epics represent the adverse, innate qualities that we flawed humans possess.

Keywords

Heroes, Homer, Iliad, Odyssey, Monsters

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Abstract

Around the late eighth or early seventh century B.C., a poet, known to later ages as Homer, composed two epic poems that tell the tales of the Trojan War, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. *The Iliad* tells the story of the rage of Achilles, the great Greek warrior, while *The Odyssey* tells the story of the coming home of Odysseus, the King of Ithaca, from the Trojan War. A study of both epics reveals that constructs portraying various values, such as the characteristics of heroes, have remained the same from the times of ancient Greece to the present day. However, modern interpretations of ancient Greek epics also portray new/ altered constructs of values in their creation of heroes, such as equality. The topics of fate, mortality, and religion in the epics are reviewed and debated. The character of Achilles, as to whether or not he is a true hero, is also subject to debate. Homer's epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* argue that heroes possess the qualities of pride, selflessness, glory, and bravery; both text and film adaptations of these original works exhibit the same characteristic of heroes, while the monsters of these ancient Greek epics represent the adverse, innate qualities that we flawed humans possess.

In the mythological story of the Trojan War, Paris, the Prince of Troy, sparks the war by taking Helen of Sparta, the most beautiful woman of the time, from King Menelaus. Menelaus seeks assistance from his brother, King Agamemnon of Mycenae, in order to exact revenge. Agamemnon helps his brother not out of love but out of a desire to acquire Troy and rule the city. They assemble a large Greek (Achaean)

army and travel to Troy; the ensuing war results in many deaths and the fall of Troy. Achilles, considered the greatest Greek warrior, fights for the Greek army. However, Achilles is against Agamemnon's rule, for he recognizes that Agamemnon is a greedy king who cares only for himself.

One common theme throughout the scholarship regarding Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* is that characteristics of heroes include selflessness, honor, glory, divinity and that they are unique in comparison to common people. In the article "The Independent Heroes of *The Iliad*," P.V. Jones writes that heroes in *The Iliad* are portrayed as being on the same level as the gods. Jones argues, "the heroes in *The Iliad* never talk in terms of divine mystery and numinosity" (113). The scene of the epic where Aphrodite rescues Paris from death at the hands of Menelaus exemplifies this idea: "[Aphrodite] carries [Paris] off to deposit him in Helen's bedroom. Aphrodite then summons Helen to join him. Menelaus searches in vain for his vanished opponent" (Jones 111). Paris makes no response to this supernatural event, because for heroes there is nothing mysterious about the supernatural. The heroes take their miracles and good luck for granted. Jones also discusses ways in which heroes are unique in comparison to others. He states, "in Achilles, however, Homer chooses to create a character who has, through his mother, unique and privileged access to the will of Zeus and knows his fate from the very start of *The Iliad*," supporting the claim that heroes are unique and set apart from regular people (Jones 115). This is also seen in the modern adaptation of *The Iliad*, 2004 film *Troy*, directed by Wolfgang Petersen, when the hero Achilles was set apart from the other

warriors during battle, making him appear god-like while watching over the fight.

During battle the death of warriors is a common occurrence, but when heroes die, they are typically given more glorious deaths. In her article “Craft Similes and the Construction of Heroes in *The Iliad*,” Naomi Rood argues that epic poetry portrays the hero’s death as beautiful because the heroes die honorably fighting for their people. Rood introduces many similes from the epic that illustrate “undying glory, *kleos aphthiton*” of heroes (20). These similes serve as praise for the fallen heroes. Examples include the similes of falling like trees, which praise the Trojan heroes Euphorbus, Imbrius, and Hector. Menelaus kills Euphorbus after Euphorbus inflicted the first wound on Patroclus’ body (Menelaus and Patroclus are Spartans/ Myrmidons, who were allies). Euphorbus “is compared to a beautiful, blooming olive sapling nurtured by a man in a well-watered pasture...But then a sudden tempest uproots and lays it low on the Earth” (Rood 25). Euphorbus is evidently praised as a flourishing, beautiful youth while losing his life in battle.

Hector is also praised as a hero through similes. Hector is Paris’ brother; they are both princes of Troy. Ajax, a Greek warrior, throws a rock at Hector, causing him to fall “like an oak tree uprooted by a blow from Zeus” (Rood 25). Homer compares Hector to an oak tree that requires a blow from Zeus to make it fall, praising his strength, which is another common characteristic of heroes. Jonathan Fenno’s article “The Mist Shed by Zeus in *Iliad* Xvii” makes note of the mist the sun god, Apollo, extends over the deceased Hector, which functions to prevent the corpse’s degradation. This illustrates that since a god is doing something to honor the corpse of a person, that person was a true, honorable hero” (Fenno 5). The fact that a god went

through the trouble to create a mist to extend over the body of Hector signifies that Hector was deserving of such protection after dying for fighting to protect his brother and his city.

The role of the gods is lessened in the lives of heroes compared to in the lives of the common people. To what extent do the myths allow heroes to shape their own destiny? One example is the hero Achilles, who was born knowing his fate, through his mother, and had access to the will of Zeus. Achilles thus already knew how his story would end, thereby allowing him to be more independent of the gods since he already knew what would become of him. Later in this paper it will be explained that Odysseus is another example; he was able to redirect fate, something thought capable only by the gods, when he blinds Poseidon’s son, the Cyclops. However, he would continue to confront numerous challenges before ultimately prevailing.

The death of Imbrius, a Trojan ally married to King Priam of Troy’s daughter, is also likened to the simile of a fallen tree. “He falls like an ash tree which is cut down on the peak of a mountain seen from afar on all sides and whose tender leaves fall to the ground” (Rood 25). The fact that the tree is seen on a distant, prominent mountain top matches Imbrius’ prominent honor at Troy. The “tender leaves” symbolize the fragility of young, mortal life and the beautiful death that compensates for that lost life (Rood 25). The death of Imbrius is beautiful because he died defending Troy, which was the highest honor for a warrior.

Great pride, notable achievements, and high honor are synonymous to glory. When one thinks of heroes from the ancient epics, one most likely thinks of a glorious, selfless fighter who would die for his people. Rood points out that ‘undying glory’ is a characteristic of heroes in the Homeric epics. She states, “like a tree taken

from nature for the ends of culture, the poem gives him immortal glory in its account of his beautiful death” (29). Rood analyzes similes in the epic to demonstrate how immortal glory is given to heroes, who have beautiful deaths because they are selfless when it comes to fighting for their people. An extension of this idea is present when Jones states, “Patroclus... by throwing in 'fate' and 'Zeus' too, he incidentally removes yet more glory from Hector” (111). This is because Hector attacks and kills Patroclus when Patroclus’ back is turned—a twist of fate and the will of the gods. Hector is a Trojan prince, while Patroclus is an Achaean who is kin to Achilles. In Jones’ statement, he insists that glory can be removed from heroes by the implications of fate and the gods; the will of the gods causes Hector to lose glory. Since Patroclus’ back is turned, Hector mistakes Patroclus for Achilles, which makes his killing of Patroclus all the less glorious. Glory is an imperative characteristic the fearless heroes possess in the epics, but in some circumstances the gods can take away glory from heroes when they act dishonorably.

Similar to Rood’s analysis of similes that honor the fallen heroes of Troy and memorialize their deaths, Kalliopi Nikolopoulou’s article “Deserting Achilles Reflections on Intimacy and Disinheritance,” presents the familiar idea that heroes represent the ideals of the community. This theme of honor is similar to Jones’ argument regarding the heroes being similar to the gods, and thus worthy of the honor bestowed upon them by the gods. J. Fred Humphrey describes the Greek warrior Achilles, in his article “Self- Interest and the Common Good in Book I of Homer’s *Iliad*,” as thinking for the common good and doing the best for the community. For example, “[Achilles argued] that each army must return to its respective home because of the risks posed not only by the

fighting, but now also by the additional dangers created by the plague” (Humphrey 58). Achilles is evidently concerned about the well-being of the armies, showing how he is selfless and caring towards others, and thus proving his honor.

Glory is clearly a major theme in Homer’s poems. In a warrior-society such as that of Greece and Troy that flourished around 3,200 years ago, a requirement of heroes was that they must earn glory for their country. Nikolopoulou states that “[war is a] celebrated instant of communal glory and national legend” (237). Both of Homer’s epics focus on the Trojan War. Glory is earned through heroically fighting in battle and, in the time of ancient Greece, earned one’s status. Humphrey also indicates that the motivation for the warriors, specifically Nestor, is to earn glory in battle—and if that means plundering cities—it will be done. Nestor is the wise old man of the Achaean army, who boosts morale by always giving advice to the rulers and the warriors. Similarly, Jones mentions how Odysseus prays to Athena for glory in battle, highlighting its importance (112). Anything dealing with the gods is highly significant in Greek mythology, and the fact that a hero is praying for glory in battle, even if it means death, indicates that a true hero is willing to give his life to earn glory for his people.

Another similarity in the scholarship regarding Homer’s famous epic poems is that they argue how anger, rage, and fury are crucial in the development of the stories. Humphrey acknowledges that *The Iliad* begins with the word anger/ rage (*mēnin*), and makes the argument that the real topic of the story is Achilles’s anger (56). Nikolopoulou also acknowledges the importance of fury in the shaping of the stories and has an in-depth discussion of *mēnin* in her article, in which she argues that “Achilles’s wrath against the arbitrary

expression of authority insists on the imperative that one ought to attend to matters of justice at precisely that moment” (237). She expresses that the wrath of Achilles against authority proves that people should do what they feel is just precisely at the moment; if they do not act, everything can change for the worse, and the development of the story would be severely altered. Therefore, another characteristic of heroes would be their morality and defense of those morals no matter what. Achilles is against Agamemnon’s authority because Agamemnon demands Achilles’s war prize, the slave girl Briseis. Achilles finds himself in the same position as Menelaus, and he feels insulted. He refuses to fight for the Greeks against the Trojans because he loves Briseis. Achilles believes that it is unacceptable to take away another man’s woman, and therefore is against Agamemnon’s authority. The rage of Achilles shapes the development of *The Iliad* and introduces that a characteristic of heroes is that they stick to their morals.

Scholarship surrounding the ancient myths also tends to discuss the way modern people would interpret some of Homer’s ideas. Nikolopoulou “[proposes] to read the *Iliad* [sic] as the tale of a hero turned deserter in his effort to foreground ethical questions such as justice, redress, and the viability of the heroic code – all of which are made secondary in the frenzy of war” (232). She defends Achilles’s desertion of the war, contrary to the common modern-day way of thinking. The modern-day American may view Achilles’s character as a traitor, since he defies the law by abstaining from fighting in the war. Nikolopoulou distances herself from that group of thought to make a positive case for him, defending him as a hero. Humphrey also defends Achilles’s actions, stating that he toils for the common good, and is “willing to offer his services [for his

people]” (58). These services include offering protection to his people, since Achilles is considered the greatest Greek warrior.

The values of honor and glory are seen throughout the ages. Doing what is honorable acts as a driving force for actions seen in the epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer, as well as in modern adaptations of these epics. For example Margaret Atwood’s novella *The Penelopiad* and the 2004 film *Troy*. Homer’s epic poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, demonstrate that heroes possess the qualities of pride, selflessness, glory, and bravery, and both of the aforementioned adaptations reinforce these ideals for the modern audience.

Homer’s poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, as well as their modern adaptations, depict Greek warriors as heroic and selfless; in this regard, common values have not altered through the ages. Specifically, honor and glory still act as the driving forces in human behavior and major values. In the original epic *The Iliad*, honor is a major theme. One example is in Book 3 where Hector, son of King Priam, rebukes his brother Paris for his lack of honor and for being a cause of the war. He taunts,

*Paris, appalling Paris! Our prince of beauty—
mad for women, you lure them to ruin!
Would to god you’d never been born,
died unwed.
That’s all I’d ask. Better that way by far
than to have you strutting here, an outrage—
a mockery in the eyes of all our enemies* (44-49).

In this quotation, Hector shows how appalled he is at his brother for his lack of honor in stealing another man’s wife and

causing a war. An interesting similarity between the original epic and the film adaptation (the 2004 film *Troy*, directed by Wolfgang Petersen) is that in the film, Hector is visually portrayed in the film in the same way one would think he would be from reading the quotation, as very angry towards his brother. On the other hand, Priam, Hector and Paris's father, the King of Troy, is much more compassionate and understanding than Hector, and states that wars have been fought over everything—glory, status, land—so it makes sense to fight a war for love. Either way, Paris's honor is debatable. Although in the epic Hector rebukes his brother for his lack of honor, the film depicts Paris as young and in love but also as honorable because he states that he does not want to see one more Trojan warrior die as a result of his actions, and makes himself fight Menelaus alone.

Literary techniques aid the building up of heroes in the epic and in the poem creating *kleos apthiton*, 'undying glory,' for its heroes. Rood states in her article that, "a beautiful death, *kalos thanatos*, consists of a warrior dying gloriously in battle at the peak of his youth and beauty and becoming a spectacle of admiration for others" (20). The author points out that similes of falling like trees praise three important, valuable Trojan heroes—Hector, Euphorbus, and Imbrius, all who died gloriously in battle. This idea of undying glory and honor being earned in valiant battle is echoed in the film *Troy*. The last words of the film are "let these names be remembered forever" (*Troy*, 2004, dir. Wolfgang Petersen). The narrator explains that people will speak of the times they lived in as the times of Hector, Achilles, and Priam—the fallen heroes of the story. The film primarily notes that these heroes will be remembered forever, echoing Rood's theory of attaining undying glory through heroic, beautiful deaths.

Similarly, honor is also discussed greatly in *The Odyssey*. In Book 1, Telemachus, Odysseus' son, is speaking to the goddess Athena. He tells her,

*Were his death known, I could not
feel such pain—
if he had died of wounds in Trojan
country
or in the arms of friends, after the
war.
They would have made a tomb for
him, the Akhaians,
and I should have all honor as his
son (280-284).*

Telemachus laments to the goddess that his father's fate is unknown to him. He holds the common belief of the time that death in battle is honorable, and if he at least knows his father died fighting in Troy, his pain will not be so great. Telemachus accuses his mother's suitors of dishonor when he states, in Book 2,

*...there is now this greater evil still:
My home and all I have are being
ruined.
Mother wanted no suitors, but like a
pack
they came—sons of the best men here
among them—
lads with no stomach for an introduction
to Ikários, her father across the sea. (51-
56)*

It is evident that Telemachus believes his mother's suitors are dishonorable. He holds the fact that they could not introduce themselves to her father before begging her for her hand in marriage as testimony to the proof of their dishonor. This lack of decorum demonstrates that the suitors are truly cowards and only want Penelope's hand in marriage to benefit themselves. She is the wealthy Queen of Ithaca, and by

marrying Penelope one of her suitors can become King. Since honor is an attribute of heroes, Penelope's suitors are unheroic; in fact, they are villains who deplete her home of its resources and will not leave after being rejected.

The Odyssey by Homer tells the tale of the coming home of the hero Odysseus, King of Ithaca, from the Trojan War. This tale is considered Part 2 of *The Iliad*. For many, the most memorable parts of the story are Odysseus' encounters with monsters and how he gets through the seemingly impossible task of defeating them. Another common feature of heroic stories comes from the stark difference between the characteristics of heroes and monsters. A hero stands for honor, glory. He may also possess semi-divine or divine attributes. The monsters on the other hand symbolize many different things, but the universal characteristics of the monsters in the typical epic are those opposite of the heroes. They are selfish, chaotic, and wreak havoc, yet after all of this, they still muster up some sympathy within the hearts of the readers when the heroes defeat them. This is because we identify with the monsters since they are only doing all they know to do. The monsters represent our innate, negative characteristics that we suppress, but suppression of qualities does not mean we do not possess them.

The first monster Odysseus faces is Calypso, a sea nymph from the island Ogygia that keeps Odysseus on her island for 8 years, and so Calypso represents the selfish qualities within people. Calypso makes an offer to Odysseus to make him immortal, since she is so lonely on her island. She cares about no one other than herself. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, the arts, and war, persuades Zeus, god of gods, to send a message to Calypso to let Odysseus go, and after 8 years he finally departs from Ogygia.

In Book Nine, Odysseus encounters the son of Poseidon, Polyphemus, otherwise known as the Cyclops. The Cyclops traps Odysseus and his men in his cave, and eats six of them. Odysseus uses his cunning to get the Cyclops drunk, and manages to blind him:

*I drew [my big hand spike] from the
coals and my four fellows
gave me a hand, lugging it near the
Kyklops
as more than natural force nerved
them; straight
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and
rammed it
deep in his crater eye (412-416).*

Using sheep to hide under, Odysseus and his men then manage to escape Polyphemus's cave. Odysseus' decision to blind the Cyclops redirects fate towards a new direction, showing that fate can be unkind. The new direction is not a positive one. Odysseus' decision to blind the Cyclops has negative implications, which include Poseidon punishing him for what he did to his son. Poseidon creates many storms on the open sea, and punishes those who attempt to assist Odysseus on his journey. In this epic Poseidon is a monster who represents evil forces, acting as a constant force of opposition. He inhibits Odysseus from reaching his goals, but through determination and after 20 years, Odysseus makes it back home. Poseidon can symbolize opposing, detrimental thoughts. Polyphemus, after he is blinded, symbolizes the negative innate quality within some to only see with one perspective, or in other words, are close-minded.

Calypso, Poseidon, and the Cyclops are certainly not the only monsters Odysseus encounters on his travels back to Ithaca from Troy. Circe is a nymph who lives in the Aegean Sea who turns Odysseus' crew into swine. Since Circe feels abused by

Odysseus, who takes his men and enters her palace without any consideration for her, she turns his men into pigs. Thus, she represents greed and wealth, because the abuse of wealth, will turn someone into a greedy person, as represented by the swine. Ultimately, Odysseus threatens Circe, forcing her to turn his men back into their original state, which she does.

Getting past the sirens is another obstacle Odysseus must face on his way back home. The sirens sing the songs of the men's pasts in order to distract their attention from steering the ship, thus luring them to their deaths. They represent temptation, and in order to achieve one's goals, one must resist temptation that will surely lead to one's doom if given in to. In Book 12, the sirens sing to Odysseus about his role in the Trojan War:

*Argos' old soldiery
On Troy beach teeming,
Charmed out of time we see.
No life on earth can be
Hid from our dreaming (241-245).*

From this excerpt, it is evident that the sirens' goal is to cause men to become lost in their past. The sirens represent regression, instead of improving and moving forward in one's life. The sirens, or temptations, should be avoided in order to achieve one's goals.

Charybdis and Scylla are also monsters that Odysseus must pass to make it home. Scylla is a six-headed sea monster who rapidly and unexpectedly snatches six of Odysseus' men, one man for each head. Scylla represents unexpected tragedy that can only be borne with perseverance. Scylla also represents the human capacity to wreak havoc and create chaos. Homer utilizes simile to compare the sea to a cauldron when he describes the chaos Charybdis causes in the open sea: "by heaven! when she/ vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron/ seething over intense fire, when the mixture/

suddenly heaves and rises" (12. 305-308).

Charybdis is an enormous whirlpool monster that swallows Odysseus's ship. When the ship is swallowed, Odysseus holds onto the branch of a fig tree until it gets out of the whirlpool. Charybdis acquires her victims slowly, in contrast to Scylla. Charybdis represents things that must stop before it is too late, because the longer one is involved, the harder it is to get out.

Surprisingly, there are many parallels one can make to one's inner qualities and ancient monsters. Perhaps Homer had this in mind when he created the epic poems. If anything can be taken from the encounters Odysseus had with the monsters, it is that one always must exercise extreme caution in whatever one does; fate can be changed at any given moment. Close-mindedness, internal regression, and the capacity to create chaos, greed, and selfishness are all negative innate qualities man may possess. As flawed human beings, we share these qualities with the monsters of the Homeric epic *The Odyssey*.

Although the values behind the characteristics of heroes and monsters have not changed from the times of ancient Greece to modern-day American society, societal values such as equality of the sexes has changed. The novella *The Penelopiad* and the TV series *Helen of Troy* place a much greater emphasis on the female roles in the epics. The mere name of the TV series *Helen of Troy* highlights the importance of the female in the shaping of the epics. This is also illustrated by the fact that *The Penelopiad* is narrated by Penelope. She tells the story of her own life, and the reader is made to sympathize with her.

The article, "'The Penelopiad' and [sic] 'Weight'. [sic] Contemporary Parodic and Burlesque Transformations of Classical Myths," by Hilde Staels, discusses modern transformations of Homer's epic *The Odyssey*. He points out how "according to

Helen of Troy, Penelope is the boring, modest, and perennially devoted wife of ancient myth” however, a modern interpretation of Homer’s poems, *The Penelopiad*, portrays Penelope as very interesting and tells the story of her life (Staels 106). This modern interpretation of *The Odyssey* places a much greater emphasis on the role of females in the stories, proving that equality is more valued in today’s society than in the society of ancient Greece about 3,200 years ago.

Margaret Atwood’s novella *The Penelopiad* is a modern-day interpretation of the classical myth *The Odyssey*, that certainly honors Penelope. The story is told from her point of view, signifying that a woman’s perspective is valued just as much as man’s in current storytelling. It is evident that Penelope is honored from the beginning of the novella through the story of her childhood. The author makes it seem that Penelope has come such a long way and has gone through so much. Her father, King Icarus of Sparta, orders her to be thrown into the sea at a young age. This story is told from Penelope’s point-of-view, and she states, “it is to this episode—or rather, to my knowledge of it—that I attribute my reserve, as well as my mistrust of other people’s intentions” (Atwood 9). This causes the reader to feel sympathy towards Penelope because of what her father does to her.

Another instance in which Penelope is honored is when she explains that the gossip spread around about her is untrue. She does only what is necessary given her circumstance. She explains that even her husband, Odysseus, supports her leading on some of her suitors to extract expensive gifts from them—which was “scant return for everything they’d eaten and wasted” (Atwood 144). The novella also builds her up as a hero due to her strong morals. When the suitors “helped themselves to the maids in the same way they helped themselves to

the sheep and the pigs and goats and cows,” Penelope comforts them to the best of her capability (Atwood 116). The other women think the maids are acting spoiled, and Penelope is reprimanded for her extreme kindness towards the girls. *The Penelopiad* illustrates the strong modern value of equality through Penelope’s morality, showing that it is not only the males of the myths that can be heroes. It is important to remember however, that the fundamental characteristics of a hero are not altered; the only thing that is different is that females are more prominent in modern adaptations.

One subject of debate in the discussion of *The Iliad* is found in the role of Achilles. Most would argue Achilles’s character is one of a hero. However, Achilles left the Trojan War, so to some he is perceived as a traitor. Achilles seeks justice and looks for answers about how practical the heroic code truly is. He always looks out for the common good, as illustrated by his announcement to warn everybody of the plague. Nikolopoulou notes,

it is not a coincidence that Achilles is portrayed in The Iliad not only as a warlike creature, but also as one who invites, the gatherer of assemblies, the master of ceremonies, and a fine host to both friends and enemies. In Book 9, he offers the Achaean embassy a generous banquet, but to its pragmatic concerns he responds with metaphor’s open-ended requirement: that the listeners be moved by language, and wish to be transported into its space (241).

This quotation builds the image of Achilles as a hero, a grand host who is generous and moved by language, and wants his guests to be as well, even if they are enemies. This

quotation demonstrates that in *The Iliad*, Achilles is a major war hero. In today's modern, American society, Achilles would be a figure of treason for leaving the war, even though he searches for justice and questions the essence of the heroic code. When Agamemnon takes Briseis away from Achilles, he feels betrayed and insulted, so he stops fighting for Agamemnon's army because he feels Agamemnon is a greedy king that does not deserve his strength as a warrior. While some find this to be sufficient justification for leaving the war, others find that his simple departure from the war makes him a traitor, not a hero, regardless of his reasons.

The literary strategy of simile that Homer utilizes in his writings creates deeper, as seen specifically through the similes of heroes falling like trees in battle. These similes indicate how the deaths of these heroes are beautiful because they die fighting for an honorable cause. It is human nature to idolize those who possess the characteristics we deem desirable in our society; thus, it makes sense that the heroes we look up to have the same characteristics, from ancient to modern-day times. The general themes present in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are still of interest to today's scholars; if this were untrue, Homeric epics would not still be taught in schools across America. The poems still speak to common values—to human nature. People idolize heroic characteristics like selflessness, glory, and honor, while the characteristics of chaos, selfishness, and close-mindedness are attributed to monsters and the negative, qualities that can reside within human nature as well. With some degree of variation, the fact that the modern adaptations show the same values illustrates their importance throughout time.

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