

Homer

How far do you think that the "wrath" or "anger" of Achilles is the central subject of the Iliad? Illustrate your answer by reference to the books of the poem you have read.

His wrath is the starting point:

it is the chief motivating action in the plot; from it spring not just the original quarrel, but enormous consequences for the Greeks, the Trojans, and for individuals on both sides - Hector and his family, Patroclus (who reveals himself to be someone different from whom we expected him to be) and for Agamemnon (whose authority is challenged) and perhaps most of all for Achilles himself. > chain reaction

Thus we can see that the outburst of anger is the prelude to the revelation of Achilles' character - and this temper is part of his character; it could be argued that it is his character as a whole which is really the subject of the Iliad - the complex personality of Achilles

for example: his egotistical pride that brooks no challenge even from his leader Agamemnon

his kindness and generosity to older men - Phoenix and Priam

his way of regarding Briseis - a possession, but yet he loves her

his attitude to Patroclus - a protective yet touchy relationship.

Above all he possesses the tragic "fatal flaw" - a pride and anger - hubris - which leads him from the solution of one rift to the death of his friend.

He is cruel, he is a killer, he is ruthless, yet he queries the code he lives by; for he is vulnerable and more aware than any of the other heroes that a short life, even with glory won in that lifetime, will leave his father bereaved; he knows, thanks to his relationship with his goddess mother, that he has a choice - short life and glory or long life and obscurity; he chooses and accepts a Heroic Fate, just as he accepts the role of the gods in human affairs; he is the one character who develops in the course of the Iliad. Perhaps the most significant feature of his wrath is that in book 1 he fails completely to control it, but in book 24 he recognises the danger signals and does control it. He has learnt - at tremendous cost to himself and Priam, not to mention the dead on both sides, what his fatal flaw is.

So if we see the Iliad as a story about vengeance from various angles, there is no doubt that the anger of Achilles is the central subject for all major events in this episode in the Trojan war arise from it; but if we see it as a story which with blood and tears demonstrates the sadness of the lives of men - "the pathos of the human condition", we shall have to allow that Achilles himself is the heart of the story, where the consequences spring from his character not merely one aspect of it.

Homer

"Patroclus and Achilles complement each other in character; each releases the hidden qualities of the other" Do you agree with this statement?

Patroclus: at first gives appearance of stereotype of gentle man:

Menelaus says he is kind and gentle

In bk 9 Patroclus is self-effacing "head cook and bottle-washer"

In bk 11 he is patient with Nestor's reminiscences; compassionate to wounded Eurypylos

Similarly Achilles gives appearance of stereotype of the proud and angry man:

in bk 1 he is revealed as headstrong, he refuses to back down, his anger clouds the respect for his superiors which the code of honour he has been taught to obey demands; his sense of judgement is destroyed by his anger.

Early impressions suggest that Patroclus is the restraining influence on Achilles: that he is Achilles' minder. It is only later that we are reminded of a less familiar part of the story -that Patroclus too has a history of violence.

Nestor reminisces in bk 11 and they produce some drastic changes in Patroclus:

Patroclus challenges Achilles (start of bk 16)

Given his head to fight, he charges into battle, releasing hidden/repressed streak of violence.

He allows his violence to cloud his judgement, and he disobeys orders - this leads to his death.

Patroclus' pleas to Achilles (and his death later on) bring about changes in Achilles:

He thinks of Patroclus' safety, rather than his own glory

He realises his own foolishness in being angry with his own side.

He is angry still, but a controlled and deliberate anger - leading to reconciliation with Agamemnon; and a proper desire for revenge against enemies: ie. he returns to the code he has previously lived by.

Eventually he takes a further step to civilised behaviour when he shows pity and understanding for a father who though an enemy is mourning the son he loved.

So we might argue that the actions of Achilles bring out the beast in the gentle Patroclus and the death of Patroclus brings out the humane in the violent Achilles. But Nestor, the elder statesman, is surely the catalyst?

Or are the characters developed to keep in step with the plot and the action, and the "switch" is purely coincidental? ie. once Achilles' anger is diverted from Agamemnon to Hector, from injured pride to vengeance for a loved companion, his character has to change?

Homer

Discuss Homer's use of similes in the Iliad.

1. Format of similes: short comparisons "like raging fire".
short stories (the lion similes)

Subject matter of similes: from natural world and everyday experience such as audience was used to facing (eg. storms; flies round milk-pail)- something in common with people of the story?

2. Purpose of simile: direct comparison(plus decoration) -heroes as predators or shepherds.
relief from violent action, variety in the "fighting books(similes frequent there)
highlight crucial "twists" in the action, as in bks 16 and 22.
hint at character eg. similes at start of bk 3; Dog star simile bk 22.

3. Similes occur in action books, not in dialogue or debate (note book 9); they are unusual in type in bk 24 where there is more visual description than elsewhere -is this significant?

4. Some recurring themes: lions on rampage; weather; fire and flood; does this suggest basic pattern with variants?

5. Thus we can see:

- (i) they are not introduced either haphazardly or systematically eg. a simile every 100 lines!
- (ii) they form neat little blocks of description, varying from cliché lions to special sinker in lure
- (iii) they vary in appropriateness.
- (iv) they highlight certain events and characters, but no general inference can be drawn.
- (v) they do not interrupt dialogue, but form a background to action

So can we conclude that:

- (i) the rhapsode found them a convenient way of providing a bit of variety for the battle scenes
 - (ii) he had a selection at his disposal and introduced them when he wanted a rest from story telling for himself and his audience.
 - (iii) they bring the epic legend down to earth, as it were, rather as the pictures on the shield of Achilles do.
 - (iv) they were part of the epic tradition like stock epithets and stock descriptions of feasts and sacrifices - ie. the audience expected them (and perhaps amused themselves listening for points of comparison as we do when we read the Iliad)
- > add life to the story
provide a respite for the rhapsode
give the audience a break from narrative and a pause for mental breath.

To what extent does Aeneas deserve to be called the True(pius)?

1. define the "true"- ie. what is pietas.
 - i. obedience to the gods > awareness of their mission for him, of his destiny.
 - ii. respect for civic values > honour towards his fellows, companions
reverence for the old and for the dead
loyalty to his city
 - iii. loyalty to his own kin, both dead and alive.
 - ie. pietas is a mixture of sense of duty, love of duty, and love of the three elements towards which pietas is directed -gods, community, family
2. give positive examples of these aspects of pietas:
 - eg. i. his reaction to sign from heaven (bk 2); to visit from Mercury (bk 4)
 - ii. respect and care for his companions(bk 1); burial of Misenus (bk 6)
reverence for Anchises, Evander, Latinus
his last-ditch stand for Troy.
 - iii. concern for his father, Creusa (bk 2) for Ascanius (bk 1, and later)
3. furthermore note:
 - i. his willingness to give up personal feelings for his mission (Dido)
 - ii. his growing acceptance of his destiny (culminating in bk 6)
4. however there are lapses: the cost of pietas is heavy:
 - i. anguish at the loss of Troy, of Creusa, of Dido, even of Pallas.
 - ii. constant struggle to survive "the rancour" of heaven(ie. Juno)
 - iii. rage and revenge among the frustrations he meets in Italy.
5. Conclusion: Aeneas is an imperfect hero; he is not always the "true". In bk 10 Aeneas the True is both a butcher and a broken-hearted killer(death of Lausus).
 - Our last sight of him at the end of bk 12 is two-edged:
 - he is triumphant - mission accomplished
 - he is mercilessly revengeful - the cost of accomplishing the mission
 - As far as his destiny is concerned he has remained true; but as a human being he still adheres to the heroic code rather than the more humane code of pietas.

Homer:

"Judging from the books of the Iliad you have read, what seem to you to be the values and ideals most important in the poem"

Starting point - Heroic code, but break it down into smaller elements:

eg. military prowess - the winner takes all, skill and courage the mark of the noble and the Hero/hero

examples: the value Achilles attaches to his ability; the reminiscences of Nestor.

2. guest-friendship(xenia) - the obligation of friendship/loyalty passed from one generation to the next.

examples: Glaucus and Diomedes - their refusal to fight once "relationship" discovered.

3. glory: to win a name for oneself is better than long life - an ideal queried by Achilles and so it is high-lighted.

example: almost any of the minor characters have this attitude

4. honour/status: represented by possessions and respect from others (the two are linked)

examples: Achilles and Agamemnon's quarrel derives from abuse of this concept; Priam brings gifts as well as an appeal for Achilles' sympathy.

5. courage: fighting bravely, at the risk of death and against the odds, must not let family down,

examples: everywhere - especially true for Hector.

6. piety: respect for the gods

examples: prayers and offerings, acceptance of their existence and of Fate.

7. justice: ie. keeping the rules of the "game"

example: the duel between Paris and Menelaus starts off with fair exchange of blows (all apparent unfairness is the result of divine intervention, which could be interpreted as the gods being the instruments of Fate)

8. self-control/right judgement/common-sense: the control of emotions and passions

examples: mostly negative - Paris' original action in abducting Helen; Achilles' reaction to loss of Briseis; Patroclus' failure to resist lust for battle. BUT Achilles and Priam control emotions - bk 24.

All these could be said to be part of the code of behaviour expected in the warrior culture which existed when the oral tradition of epic poetry was in full flight - era of the strong man, the feudal system based on property, family and prowess. life is short- enjoy it; mortal man is vulnerable

But Homer lived much later than the period he was writing about when war was not the dominant feature of most men's lives, but a seasonal or occasional evil, hence other values appear in the Iliad:

1. love/affection: there is time now for family life (man the hunter, now man the gatherer)

examples: Achilles' affection for his father; Hector's for his wife and child.

2. pathos: the sadness of man's mortality outweighs the glory of death in battle; the young and the lovely are too vulnerable still

examples: comments of the young men who will leave their fathers childless; the comments of Achilles to Priam in bk 24; the grief of Andromache at Hector's death

3. respect for the living and the dead: human life is now something of value

example: the struggle to obtain decent burial for the dead; Achilles' querying of the Heroic Code.

Thus the two set of values cross-fertilise each other - the result is an epic "blood and thunder" epic narrative which is also a tragedy.