



Ο ΟΜΗΡΟΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΣΚΕΨΗ

ΕΝΑΡΚΤΗΡΙΑ ΔΙΑΛΕΞΗ: **DIANE CUNY**



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ΑΘΗΝΑ 2019

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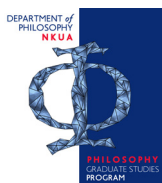
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ΠΕΡΙΕΧΟΜΕΝΑ

ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ

ΠΡΩΤΟ ΜΕΡΟΣ

DIANE CUNY.....	11
Ο ΟΜΗΡΟΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΣΚΕΨΗ: ΜΕΡΙΚΟΙ ΣΤΟΧΑΣΜΟΙ ΓΙΑ ΤΗ ΣΥΝΑΝΤΗΣΗ ΑΧΙΛΛΕΑ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΙΑΜΟΥ (<i>ΙΛΙΑΣ</i> , Ω΄)	
HOMER AND GREEK THOUGHT. SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE MEETING BETWEEN ACHILLEUS AND PRIAM IN <i>ILIAD'S</i> BOOK 24.....	29
ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ ΑΡΑΜΠΑΤΖΗΣ.....	43
ΤΙ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΤΟ ΑΡΧΙΚΕΙΜΕΝΟ. ΜΕΡΙΚΕΣ ΣΚΕΨΕΙΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΝ ΟΜΗΡΟ ΚΑΙ ΤΗ <i>ΒΙΒΛΟ</i>	
ΓΕΡΑΣΙΜΟΣ ΚΑΚΟΛΥΡΗΣ.....	53
Η ΦΙΛΟΞΕΝΙΑ ΣΤΗΝ ΟΜΗΡΟΥ <i>ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑ</i> ΚΑΙ ΤΗ <i>ΒΙΒΛΟ</i>	
ΑΧΙΛΛΕΑΣ ΚΛΕΙΣΟΥΡΑΣ.....	63
ACHILLES' JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY: FROM <i>ΚΛΕΟΣ</i> TO <i>ΕΛΕΟΣ</i>	
ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ Δ. ΠΡΩΤΟΠΑΠΑΔΑΚΗΣ.....	77
ΑΙΑΣ	
ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ ΣΤΕΙΡΗΣ.....	85
Ο ΟΜΗΡΟΣ ΣΤΟ ΔΥΤΙΚΟ ΜΕΣΑΙΩΝΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΑΝΑΓΕΝΝΗΣΗ	

ΔΕΥΤΕΡΟ ΜΕΡΟΣ

ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ ΒΛΑΧΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ.....	95
Η <i>ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑ</i> ΤΟΥ ΟΜΗΡΟΥ ΚΑΙ Η <i>ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑ</i> ΤΟΥ <i>ΔΙΑΣΤΗΜΑΤΟΣ</i> ΤΟΥ ΣΤΑΝΛΕΪ ΚΙΟΥΜΠΡΙΚ	

ΠΕΝΝΥ ΓΡΟΥΒΑ	105
Η ΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΨΥΧΗΣ ΣΤΑ ΟΜΗΡΙΚΑ ΕΠΗ	
ΠΑΝΑΓΙΩΤΗΣ Ι. ΚΩΤΣΙΡΑΣ	111
ΟΙ ΠΕΡΙ ΤΟ «ΝΟΕΙΝ» ΕΝΝΟΙΕΣ ΤΟΥ ΟΜΗΡΟΥ ΚΑΙ Η ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΑΥΤΩΝ	
ΓΙΩΡΓΟΣ ΜΠΑΝΙΩΚΟΣ	123
Η ΣΗΜΑΣΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΔΙΕΡΓΑΣΙΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΠΕΝΘΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΘΡΗΝΟΥ ΣΤΗΝ <i>ΙΛΙΑΔΑ</i> ΤΟΥ ΟΜΗΡΟΥ	
ΓΙΩΡΓΟΣ ΜΠΙΦΗΣ	133
Η ΣΥΝΥΦΑΝΣΗ ΕΣΩΤΕΡΙΚΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΩΝ ΔΥΝΑΜΕΩΝ ΣΤΗΝ <i>ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑ</i> : ΤΟ ΠΡΟΒΛΗΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΤΑΥΤΟΤΗΤΑΣ	
ΕΛΠΙΝΙΚΗ Α. ΤΣΙΚΛΕΙΔΗ	139
Η ΠΑΙΔΑΓΟΓΙΚΗ ΑΞΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΕΠΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΟΜΗΡΟΥ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΕΦΗΒΙΚΗ ΗΛΙΚΙΑ	
ΤΑΞΙΑΡΧΗΣ ΤΣΙΜΠΕΡΗΣ	145
ΒΙΟΙ ΠΑΡΑΛΛΗΛΟΙ: ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΝΟ ΚΑΙ ΘΕΙΟ ΣΤΟ ΟΜΗΡΙΚΟ ΕΠΟΣ	
ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΣ Β. ΦΙΛΙΟΣ	153
Η ΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΑΡΕΤΗΣ ΣΤΟΝ ΟΜΗΡΟ	

ACHILLES' JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY: FROM ΚΛΕΟΣ TO ΕΛΕΟΣ

ΑΧΙΛΛΕΑΣ ΚΛΕΙΣΟΥΡΑΣ

And even more honor is due to them
when they foresee (as many do foresee)
that in the end Ephialtis will make his appearance,
that the Medes will break through after all.

C.P.Cavafy

Like the Spartans at Thermopylae, Achilles knew also that Ephialtes eventually would ‘make his appearance’. He knew full well that if he killed Hector, his own death would follow shortly after. Regardless of this knowledge, however, Achilles did what he thought he had to. He accepted the fact of his death and devoted himself into winning a seemingly futile victory. In this paper I wish to examine the transformation of the character of Achilles throughout the *Iliad*. I will investigate the underlying motives of his great wrath and argue that it is not in fact Agamemnon’s insult that caused it but the agony of his own existential problem. Finally, I will also try to show how in his effort to solve this problem, Achilles is led to a journey of self-discovery and acceptance of self and others. For this purpose, I will focus mainly on his quarrel with Agamemnon in book 1 of the *Iliad*, the embassy of Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix to Achilles in book 9, the request of Patroclus and his subsequent death in books 16 and 18, the death of Hector in book 22 and finally, the meeting of Achilles with Priam in book 24.¹

A MATTER OF HONOR?

In the beginning of the *Iliad* in book 1, Achilles gets into a heated argument with Agamemnon and as a result announces his decision to withdraw from battle. He believes that Agamemnon, with his actions, failed to honor him, “the best Greek of all”.² His response is one that will

¹ Throughout this paper I use Lombardo’s translation and his spelling of Greek names.

² *Iliad*, 1. 259.

cost dearly to the army of the Achaeans since, as everyone acknowledges, Achilles is “a mighty bulwark in this evil war”.³ But what is it that infuriated him so much and made him decide to jeopardize the outcome of the whole expedition as well as the lives of his friends? Is it solely because his honor was slighted? Or is there something else as well? By examining Achilles’ words in lines 367-370, one could argue that there might also be another reason for his tremendous rage: He has been born to live a short life, one of *honor*. Achilles is the most exceptional warrior among the Greeks not merely because of his military prowess but, most importantly, due to the fact that he is the only warrior at Troy who was given a choice and chose to sacrifice his life in exchange for everlasting glory.

If we were to speculate on the implications of such a choice on Achilles’ emotional world, we could say that the first and most obvious is a strong feeling of being apart from the community of warriors fighting at Troy. Achilles seems incapable of creating an emotional bond with anyone. Although he lives within the boundaries of a society where soldiers “eat together, worship the gods together, participate in councils together” (Lombardo 1997, 22) he remains in fact completely isolated.

The second implication, and of far greater importance, has to do with Achilles’ most characteristic trait as a warrior: his unceasing rage. One could argue that he has been experiencing increasing turmoil as a result of realizing that he bargained his life in exchange for a concept of honor that increasingly proves to be unsatisfactory. He expects and demands to be “honored fully and fittingly” more than any other warrior in Troy (Schein 1984, 100-101). The choice Achilles has made and his unique and peculiar predicament, place upon him the strain, as Schein puts it, of being “the limiting case of what it means to be a hero and of the validity of the normal code of values by which heroes live and die” (Schein 1984, 101). Achilles then, appears to be an absolute rule unto himself, but, rather than ascribing that to narcissism as MacClary (1982, 58) argues, it may be the only appropriate compensation he can expect from society as a reward for the impossible choice he has made.

Agamemnon’s insult then, instead of being the sole cause of Achilles’ rage, might merely be the stimulus that makes his existential pain sur-

³ *Iliad*, 1. 299.

face, since he is constantly aware of the fact -due to his own choice- that his life is "all too brief".⁴ Although he made this choice on his own, it seems to be one that he was compelled to make by the reality of being who he is: a warrior of enormous physical gifts and with an emotional contact with the divine (Van Nortwick 1992, 44). Under the knowledge of his special fate, he also feels the urgency to receive as much gratification as possible. However, nothing can be an adequate compensation for having traded his life and that leads him to disregard society -and what it has to offer him- all together. By rejecting society's values, however, Achilles consequently also comes to doubt the warrior's way of life and the heroic code that emanate from such a system. But if honor is not the answer then what is? (Van Nortwick 1992, 44).

As we move to book 9 of the *Iliad*, Achilles allows himself to briefly escape from this deep frustration. His conditions in order to return to battle are impossible to meet. As he greets the embassy of Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix that have come to plead for his return, he informs them that even if Agamemnon were to give him gifts "as numberless as grains of sand"⁵ he wouldn't fight again along the Achaean army. His decision to abstain from battle though, is not just a reflection of his inner turmoil. Nor does it reflect his wish to evade his fate of which he is ignorant, as Rutherford (1982, 146) argues. And surely, it holds much more significance than Achilles being merely carried away into hyperbole, as Schein (1984, 109) suggests. To my view, it seems to be the only way he can figure to avoid the responsibility of having to make a choice that does not satisfy him. In a sense, to avoid the burden that society has imposed upon him as it has become painfully clear to him that "nothing is worth [his] life". In effect, rather than trying to evade his fate, Achilles is seeking a way to *alter* it. But in this effort he finds himself even more isolated than before. As much as he had been isolated within society's boundaries because of his burden up to that point, he now finds himself completely apart from society due to his decision to let that burden down. Nevertheless, he has managed to avoid the turmoil of his frustration by redirecting it outside himself to a real and tangible target -Agamemnon- and

⁴ *Iliad*, 1. 437.

⁵ *Iliad*, 9. 397.

⁶ *Iliad*, 9. 415.

this has helped him justify his feelings of anger and momentarily shift to a newly found state of calmness. This can be feasibly argued when, in line 190 of book 9, the embassy finds him “plucking clear notes on a lyre”, an activity that gives evidence of such an emotional state.

Calm as he may appear though, Achilles has not yet accepted the underlying pain that his isolation from society must certainly cause him. Such an acceptance would only place him back in an impossible situation, facing an unsolvable problem. That is, whether or not honor-bearing gifts are a worthwhile compensation for the loss of life in battle. As the embassy of Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix addresses him, there is a new conflict in his heart. Achilles’ answers to his friends portray a man overwhelmed by emotions but also, in a more subtle way, give proof of the compassion he feels for them (Van Nortwick 1992, 48). He addresses them lovingly and thoughtfully in the midst of his feelings of anger and shame.⁷ In the words of Lattimore, “he is a man of culture and intelligence; he knows how to respect heralds, how to entertain estranged friends [...] He is not only a great fighter but a great gentleman...” (Lattimore 1961, 48). The inability however to express the full measure of his compassion due to the peculiar predicament he has found himself in fuels him with a fit of rage that he vents against Agamemnon anew. Achilles then, does indeed feel he has to repress his compassionate side and makes an ‘attempt to cover genuine concern’ as Van Nortwick (1992, 56) argues. However, he does not do so out of mere pride or anger. At the root of his perceived ‘indifference’ toward his friends’ requests lies his existential problem and the intensity of his inner battle as a result of his refusal to trade his life any more in adherence to the dictates of a rigid heroic *code*. It is not the case then, as Schein (1984, 116) suggests, that Achilles is caught between his feelings of love and his anger toward Agamemnon, but rather that he seems to be torn between his feelings of compassion and a desire to re-define himself and his way of living in compliance with a new set of values.

DEATH OF A FRIEND

Upon this physical as well as spiritual ‘island of isolation’ that

⁷ *Iliad*, 9. 201-208.

Achilles seems to have stranded upon, he shares however, a very strong and unique bond with Patroclus, a bond that allows him to keep contact with the rest of humanity. The scenes with Patroclus from book 11 onward describe someone who is very empathetic and conscious of the needs of the community in which he lives. Van Nortwick argues that the personality of Patroclus is complementary to that of Achilles and that his function is mainly to represent the parts of Achilles that remain dormant such as his compassion and altruism (Van Nortwick 1992, 49). He also argues that Achilles, contrary to Patroclus, lacks the ability to see himself as part of a larger picture and cannot put the interests of others before his own honor (Van Nortwick 1992, 53). Truly, Patroclus possesses these qualities to a great extent, but it is my view that they do not serve to demonstrate a lack of similar qualities in Achilles' emotional arsenal. On the contrary, the lively description of Patroclus' caring for the woes of the Achaean army serve to instigate and uncover the fervent compassion and sense of community that are a central part of the heroic persona exemplified by Achilles. At this crucial juncture, these feelings have been suspended as something else has appeared with such urgency that everything else seems to be excluded. One could argue that it is anger; others, like Nortwick, that Achilles' compassion cannot be expressed because then it would overshadow his sense of honor. However plausible these explanations, they fail however to take into consideration the perplex nature of Achilles' existential dilemma and its' moral implications: How is he allowed to feel compassion towards a community the values of which he has rejected?

Unavoidably, Achilles finds himself in an emotional isolation where his only connection with others seems to be his relationship with Patroclus. Even this crucial relationship though seems to be grounded more on feelings of loyalty and kinship rather than on true understanding and communication. Patroclus appears unaware of the deep emotional turmoil of Achilles as well as the existential dilemma he is facing. This is indicated not only by his harsh words as he attempts to convince him to return to battle, but also by his inability to fathom any other reason for Achilles' behavior other than his spite and anger towards Agamemnon. As a result, Achilles eventually yields to Patroclus' requests and allows him to lead the Myrmidons into battle. But what is the meaning of al-

lowing him to help the Greek army win when, at the same time, he prays to Zeus for exactly the opposite? Why this inconsistency? Is it because he feels utterly dependent on the solace of a friendship that allows him a glimpse of his humanity and of his need for a community of others? The absurdity of his situation seems to overwhelm him and when he answers to Patroclus in lines 52-107 of book 16, it is not denial (Van Nortwick 1992, 56) that his words echo but an anxious attempt to avoid a fatal -as he perceives it- confrontation. His rigorousness seems to dissolve as he gradually admits that he “never meant to hold [his] grudge forever.”⁸ As Achilles witnesses the gradual distancing of Patroclus, he makes an effort to preserve the exclusive intimacy of their relationship and his words carry the sentiment of these futile hopes:

Iliad 16. 102-107

O Patroclus, I wish to father Zeus
And to Athena and Apollo
That all of them, Greeks and Trojans alike,
Every last man on Troy's dusty plain,
Were dead, and only you and I were left
To rip Ilium down, stone by sacred stone.

The fact that Patroclus does not share the same vision as he, only serves to emphasize Achilles' tragic isolation even more (Van Nortwick 1992, 57-59).

In his effort to avoid the emotional distancing of his friend, Achilles allows Patroclus' actual physical distancing which as a consequence leads to his death. When in book 18 he learned the news he was so devastated that “he stretched his huge body out in the dust and lay there, tearing out his hair with his hands”.⁹ Homer's vivid description brings to mind the image of a dead man. Indeed, a popular interpretation of this passage is that it illustrates the fact that Achilles is identifying with the deceased (Van Nortwick 1992, 67) and that he equates the death of Patroclus with his own (Schein 1984, 132). Such an interpretation tends to regard Patroclus as a ‘self-object’ barely distinguishable from himself (Maclary 1982, 64). Which can account for the fact that when Patroclus dies, Achilles cannot deal with the painful reality of his emotional de-

⁸ *Iliad*, 16. 62-63.

⁹ *Iliad*, 18. 27-29.

pendence on his friend. In fact, it is not that Patroclus' death awakens in Achilles a sense of connectedness to other people. Instead, it makes his isolation truly complete and so painful that he loses "the will to remain alive among men".¹⁰

In book 18 of the *Iliad*, when Achilles addresses his mother it seems he holds himself responsible for his friend's death: "I loved him, and I killed him".¹¹ He is aware, however, that it was Patroclus that brought his death upon him by deciding to go to battle and fight Hector. This becomes quite clear when addressing Antilochus, on lines 14-16 he says:

***Iliad* 18. 14-16**

Damn him! I told him only to repel
The enemy fire from our ships,
And not to take Hector in fight.'

Why then does he insist on blaming himself? Is it, as Yamagata (1991, 15) tells us, that Achilles must "blame himself forever for not being capable of something impossible?" Is this all pervasive sense of responsibility a trait of the heroic persona that extends to everything and all the hero cares for? (Rutherford 1982, 157). Or could there be some other unforeseen and more subtle reason behind Achilles' guilt, a hidden and unconscious desire to see the death of his friend and what this death might represent?

Van Nortwick (1992, 64) argues that through Patroclus, Achilles killed the unacknowledged parts of himself and now feels responsible. By sending (or believing that he sent) Patroclus to his death, Achilles is in fact 'executing' the compassionate part of himself that stands in the way towards his pursuit of absolute honor (Van Nortwick 1992, 62). I agree with this argument only partly. Achilles may have, at some level, desired Patroclus' death but not in order to free himself from his compassionate side. Rather, he wants to unburden himself from the dependence on a relationship that thrives on the illusion of a mutual exclusivity from society. With Patroclus gone, the relationship is severed and the illusion of being a part of society while at the same time standing apart from it is abruptly shattered.

Even after Patroclus' death, Achilles remains distinctly detached

¹⁰ *Iliad*, 18. 95-96.

¹¹ *Iliad*, 18. 85-86.

from the communal life of the army. He is yet incapable of perceiving some other way of functioning in society. As the other warriors eat their meal, an activity that represents a shared social ritual (Schein 1984, 139) Achilles abstains. His self imposed 'cell' of isolation is no more endurable without Patroclus by his side and this becomes increasingly evident. Furthermore, with the certainty of his own imminent death approaching, his alienation from the human community reaches its height and he becomes a complete alien. As he returns once again to battle, he is not a member of the Achaean army anymore but instead, a rogue warrior engaged in a solitary battle with death (Schein 1984, 129-144).

The moment Achilles enters the battlefield he has resolved to die and, even more, has accepted it. Surely one could argue that Achilles' decision to kill Hector is not made out of his own free will but is rather 'dictated' by his intense feelings of guilt and anger, an anger which has now shifted its' focus from Agamemnon to Hector. And since, as Van Nortwick (1992, 66) tells us "anger at Hector is also anger at himself driven by guilt", by killing Hector he can sooth his guilt, vent his anger and eventually avoid the pain of isolation since he is led to his own death as well.

However, through his resolution to offer his life for a victory that has no meaning, Achilles transcends the values of the warrior and reaches a higher level of understanding. His suffering allows him to expand his view of society and redefine the guiding values by which he has been living his life until now (Rutherford 1982, 158). Through suffering, he moves towards *catharsis* and eventually finds his way back to his humane nature with a new and fundamental knowledge: that all humans are equal in their mortality. By coming to view Patroclus and Hector as equals in the face of death, he also recognizes the essence of his mortality for the first time. This is the realization he expresses when addressing Lycaon in book 21:

Iliad 21. 112-117

You die too, friend. Don't take it hard.
Patroclus died, and he was far better than you.
Take a look at me, do you see how huge I am,
How beautiful? I have a noble father,
My mother was a goddess, but I too
Am in death's shadow.

When Achilles refers to Lycaon as 'friend' he is doing so in the light of their common mortal fate. In Schein's words, he "invites the Trojan youth to join him in the solidarity of death" (Schein 1984, 148).

However, Achilles' heart is still filled with anger and even in the light of his newfound realization he is far from experiencing true compassion. In books 21-23 of the *Iliad*, he becomes the "very angel of death" since "death only is purity" (Schein 1984, 149). He allows himself to experience the sheer force of destruction and goes equally after men, gods and the elements of nature, as when he challenges the river Scamander in book 21. The Achilles that Hector finally encounters is a man that has turned into a beast, blinded by anger and pain. There is no room for bargains with the creature that he has become. When Hector pleads to him to respect his dead body, he answers "I wish my stomach would let me cut off your flesh in strips and eat it raw for what you've done to me".¹² Achilles has reached the uttermost point of his inhumanity and Hector realizes this when he addresses him in his dying words:

Iliad 22. 395-397

So this is Achilles.
There was no way to persuade you.
Your heart is a lump of iron.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

With Hector dead, Achilles enters the final stage of his tragic journey. He now finds himself devoid of the all-consuming rage that propelled his actions up to that point. Repeatedly he defiles Hector's body in an effort to cling to his wrath. After all, it was his wrath that offered him a sense of purpose and by letting it go he finds himself utterly lost. The loss of his unceasing rage signifies, at the same time, a loss of self. Achilles is required to address this tremendous loss and 'answer' in a functional and meaningful way. In order to gain the life supporting knowledge he craves and realize something of his true nature, Achilles has to transcend the limits of human suffering and move into the last and most crucial part of his tragic journey (Van Nortwick 1992, 74). For this, he will need the help of a most unexpected visitor: his enemy, Priam.

¹² *Iliad*, 22. 384-386.

The bond that is formed between Achilles and Priam in book 24 of the *Iliad*, becomes the ‘vehicle’ of the final part of his journey to self-discovery. Awkward as it may seem, it is in fact most fitting that the father of Patroclus’ killer is the one with whom Achilles forms this vital bond with, since he and Priam, have more in common than he has with any of his fellow Greeks (Rutherford 1982, 158). They both lost their loved ones and by persisting to cling on their grief they are cut off from the living community. As Van Nortwick puts it, “the end of grief for both will entail reversing this dynamic, letting go of the dead and rejoining the living” (Van Nortwick 1992, 78). For Priam, the physical absence of his son’s dead body has not allowed him yet to grieve. On the other hand, Achilles’ possession of it has kept him stuck in anger. At this point, what both men need above all is to allow their hearts to grieve. It is what Priam acknowledges when he tells his wife Hecuba that he needs to satisfy his “desire for grief”¹³ even at risk of his own life.

When Priam enters Achilles’ hut in supplication, he touches the knees and kisses the “dread and murderous hands that had killed so many of his sons”.¹⁴ This gesture has such an impact that it makes Achilles gaze upon him and wonder if he is in fact a god. However, the catalyst lies not so much in the actions of Priam as it does in his words. The old man evokes to Achilles the memory of his father, Peleus¹⁵ as he addresses him: “Remember your father, godlike Achilles. He and I both are on the doorstep of old age”. Through the process of remembering and sharing their memories the two men are re-animating those lost to them. As Van Nortwick (1992, 78-80) points out, “Priam’s suggestion that Achilles thinks of Peleus and himself together, as fathers grieving for their sons, is significant. To do so requires Achilles to realign his perspective radically: the two men go from mortal enemies to fellow sufferers, united by their pain”. Achilles now comes to see his own father in the face of Priam and gains insight into something he was unable to see before, the common nature of pain in all humans. By experiencing the pain of his enemy through the agony of a suffering parent he is able to realize that, in truth, pain is *one* and has only different facets. As he sees how Hector

¹³ *Iliad*, 24. 243.

¹⁴ *Iliad*, 24. 509-510.

¹⁵ *Iliad*, 24. 520-522.

was to Priam what he is to his lonely old father Peleus (Rutherford 1982, 159), he projects Peleus on Priam (Schein 1984, 159). In that moment his grief finally overwhelms him and he has a breakthrough (l. 544-551):

Iliad 24. 544-551

...sorrow for his own father
Welled up in Achilles. He took Priam's hand
And gently pushed the old man away.
The two of them remembered. Priam,
Huddled in grief at Achilles' feet, cried
And moaned softly for his man-slaying Hector.
And Achilles cried for his father and
For Patroclus. The sound filled the room.

Achilles is finally able to express his tremendous grief. He cries for Peleus, he cries for Patroclus but he also grieves for himself and his tragic fate. By releasing the pain in the presence of Priam, now a trusted witness of his vulnerability and fragility, he finds a path back to the human community and is able to connect and heal the part of himself that had kept him apart and isolated until now. Achilles finds his way back to others and back to his own heart: as Priam 'travels' alongside with him in this emotional journey, he becomes in a sense, his father (Schein 1984, 159).

In the following lines we are informed that "Achilles had his fill of grief and the aching sorrow left his heart".¹⁶ As his emotional world is slowly transforming, his behavior also shifts and now his obsessive pre-occupation with the dead (Van Nortwick 1992, 81) is replaced with a concern for the living, in this case Priam. Achilles takes the old man and sits him on a chair, urging him to rest. Even more, he now finds compassion in him and tries to comfort the old man's pain with soothing words. After all, he says "there is nothing to be gained from cold grief",¹⁷ words that are directed to Priam as much to himself. Achilles appears to have gained a deep understanding of humanity's eternal truths and finally realizes what Apollo as a god always knew: that "the Fates have given men an enduring heart".¹⁸ Now, in a gesture of true solidarity he offers his newfound knowledge to Priam:

¹⁶ *Iliad*, 24. 552-553.

¹⁷ *Iliad*, 24. 563.

¹⁸ *Iliad*, 24. 53.

***Iliad* 24. 592-551**

You must endure this grief and not constantly grieve.
You will not gain anything by torturing yourself
Over the good son you lost, not bring him back.
Sooner you will suffer some other sorrow.

Achilles then is ready to return and re-establish himself within the community in a positive and meaningful way. After the hero's self-imposed exile, Homer reveals the change that has transpired in a subtle way, on line 659 of book 24. When he describes how Achilles leaps out of the door of his hut like a lion, he tells us that he is followed by Automedon and Alcimus. This very telling imagery signifies that, for the first time after his quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles appears to be *accompanied* and not merely in the presence of others. It is an indication that he is not alone anymore. Achilles' acceptance of the community and of its values is illustrated further by the fact that he accepts the ransom that Priam brought. When in book 9 Achilles had refused Agamemnon's gifts as insufficient to measure up the worth of his life, he had discarded society's measure of value altogether without offering an alternative. Now, having realized that there can be no compensation for one's life and that this is in fact humanity's tragic fate, he accepts the value of material rewards as the only plausible compensation.

Achilles has eventually let go of his anger and it is time for him to also let go of its' physical manifestation, the dead body of Hector. In a most poignant scene, after the slaves had bathed and anointed the corpse, "Achilles himself lifted him up and placed him on a pallet".¹⁹ As he places the body of Hector down, Achilles is symbolically laying down his own burden as well. He has finally forgiven himself and it is only natural that he asks the same from dead Patroclus: "Don't be angry with me, dear friend".²⁰

Achilles' symbolic return to the realms of the human community is finalized when he persuades a reluctant Priam to share with him a meal by reminding him the legend of Niobe who was able to eat although her loss was even greater than his (Schein 1984, 161). After satisfying their desire for food and drink, the two men gazed at each other in admiration.

¹⁹ *Iliad*, 24. 636-638.

²⁰ *Iliad*, 24. 640.

Achilles has reached a place of deeper understanding of the human realm, where he can admit to owing both to the needs of the dead as well as of the living. His tragic journey has led him to discover that there is only one thing of paramount importance to humanity: to be able to follow the unimpeded motion of the cycle of life and death. Having travelled full circle, he finds himself transformed and with a deeper understanding of the world and his place in it. In Schein's words (1984, 162) "[he] is not changed into a new and different character...rather he is re-established as his distinctive self." The purpose of his bond with Priam has now been fulfilled and he can retire and allow himself some respite from his share of suffering, a suffering that is 'inherent in the conditions of human life' (Schein 1984, 162).

«ΠΑΘΕΙ ΜΑΘΟΣ»: THE ROAD TO KNOWLEDGE

The story of Achilles' anger echoes the tragedy of the human race where suffering is seen not only as an intrinsic part of life but as a spiritual teacher as well. This is what Aeschylus meant when he wrote in his play *Agamemnon*, "πάθει μάθος": in order to learn, man must suffer. Through the suffering of his loss, Achilles is able to gain the most important knowledge of all, the knowledge of self.

By focusing only on the divine part of his nature, as he was born from a deity, he had lost sight of his common bonds with the rest of humanity. His unique and magnificent nature had condemned him to live in a world of isolation, standing apart from everyone else -except Patroclus. Patroclus represents his one bond with humanity and with the human nature lying dormant inside him. It is a bond serving in fact as a substitute for his love-starved nature, as he has been voluntarily 'expelled' from human community. When this bond is shattered, Achilles can no more identify with any of the divine nor any of the human elements in the background of his emotional world. He becomes a creature of pure instinct discarding anything humane about him but his human form. It is necessary for him to loose himself completely in order to find his way back to his forgotten mortal side. As he recognizes the face of death in Patroclus and then Hector, Achilles eventually is able to look at the face of his own death. It is then that he is able to realize that death, is not a measure for valor as the heroic code had dictated thus far, but is in fact

the common and unavoidable fate of all mortal human beings. It is the fate of Patroclus, his most loved friend; it is the fate of his enemy Hector, a warrior like him; it is the fate of his father growing old, alone at his homeland far away; and is the fate of Priam, a noble old man not much unlike his own father. Finally, he realizes, that it is his own unavoidable fate, one he has to accept in order to fully realize the potential of the human experience, fragile though it may be.

As Achilles re-connects to his basic humanity and accepts his human fate, he eventually finds his place among his fellow mortals. In his painful journey of self-discovery, he has eventually shifted from the divine realm of his mother to the mortal one of his father and, in effect, has reached maturity and a new level of self-knowledge.

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