

## THE WRATH OF ACHILLES: HEROISM OR HUBRIS

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the complex duality of heroism through the character of Achilles as portrayed in The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller and The Silence of the Girls by Pat Barker. The study examines Achilles's journey through the lens of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey framework, analyzing his transformation from a noble warrior to a grief driven avenger. By contrasting the perspectives of Patroclus and Briseis, the paper highlights how narrative voice influences the perception of heroism. The research uses qualitative textual analysis to explore how love, loss, pride, and violence shape Achilles's legacy. Findings suggest that heroism is subjective, shaped by perspective and context, and that Achilles embodies both heroic ideals and human flaws. This analysis invites readers to reconsider fixed definitions of heroism and to understand that a hero can also be a figure of moral ambiguity.*

**Keywords:** Achilles, Heroism, Hero's Journey.

### A. INTRODUCTION

This paper was written to explore the idea that a hero is not always seen the same way by everyone. In stories, history, or real life, someone can be called a hero because of their actions, bravery, or strong leadership. People may admire them, follow them, and even see them as a symbol of hope or strength. However, the same person can also be viewed very differently by others. To some, that "hero" might not be a hero at all they might be seen as a villain, a destroyer, or even a butcher.

This is what makes the idea of a hero more complicated than it first seems. Being a hero is not just about doing something great. It also depends on who is telling the story and from what point of view. For example, a soldier may be called a hero by their own country for fighting in a war, but the people on the other side of that war may see the same soldier as a killer. In one place, they are honored. In another, they are feared or hated.

In this paper, we will explore this two-sided reality of a hero, which in our paper we will be discussing about Achilles. We want to show that heroism is not always clear or simple. Sometimes, a person can be both good and bad at the same time, depending on who you ask. By looking at different examples and points of view, we hope to help readers understand that a hero's story often has more than one side, and that it's important to look at all sides before deciding what someone truly is.

By writing this paper, we hope to help readers think more deeply about what it really means to be a hero. We want to show that heroism is not always about being perfect or doing what everyone agrees is right. Instead, it is often full of complex situations and choices that can be judged differently by different people.

### B. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter examines the hero's journey of Achilles as depicted in The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller, following his growth through the common stages of a hero's path: departure, challenges, and return. The story follows Achilles from his early training with Chiron, through his close relationship with Patroclus, to his role in the Trojan War and his

tragic death. We can see that Achilles not just as a brave and famous warrior, but also as a complicated person influenced by love, honor, and destiny.

Furthermore, this chapter considers how the perspective of Briseis complicates the traditional understanding of Achilles's heroism. Though a secondary character, Briseis offers critical insight into the emotional and moral consequences of Achilles's actions. Her perspective draws attention to the overlooked experiences of women and other marginalized figures in war, thereby questioning the ethical dimensions of heroism. By including Briseis's voice, Miller disrupts the glorification of Achilles and presents a more varied portrayal of his character. This dual perspective encourages readers to reflect on the cost of heroism and to reconsider what it truly means to be a hero in both myth and literature.

### x3.2 Modern Reader's Perception of Achilles Heroism from Distinct Character's Perspective

Achilles, a major character in Homer's *Iliad*, has long been known for bravery, heroic maturity, and martial power. Yet, new literary adaptations such as Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* challenge readers to question what heroism means by giving narrative views outside the standard heroic perspective.

Miller's *The Song of Achilles* tells the Trojan War from the perspective of Patroclus, Achilles' comrade and lover. This narrative change has a major impact on readers' emotional alignment. According to Carla's (Otero, 2020) gender studies analysis, Miller's interpretation of Achilles' identity points out the mistreatment of women and slaves in Ancient Greece, while encouraging diversity, queer inclusion, and flexible gender roles. Achilles transforms into a very emotional and vulnerable character, whose heroic status is linked to personal love and grief rather than pure combat dominance. Thus, the readers are attracted into an intimate emotional journey, understanding with Achilles not as a bloodied victor, but as a flawed human capable of empathy and loss.

In contrast, Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* gives voice to Briseis, a captive woman who is usually left to the margins of Homeric epics. Achilles' courage loses its appeal when seen through her eyes. According to Merve's (ALTIN, 2021) analysis of the novel via the lens of *écriture féminine*, Barker points out the female body and experience to oppose phallogocentric (male-centric) narratives. The reader, like Briseis, cannot glorify Achilles' achievements without understanding the moral cost. This image of heroism, stripped of its majesty, raises difficult questions: Can a guy who enslaves and silences women still be considered a hero? Barker asks readers to face this conflict, transforming Achilles into a morally ambiguous character.

For modern readers, these contrasting images provide a complex sense of heroism. In *The Song of Achilles*, Achilles' compassion and devotion to Patroclus earns him empathy. In *The Silence of the Girls*, empathy turns to the silenced victims, particularly Briseis, encouraging readers to challenge narratives that glorify conquest.

#### **Achilles' Duality of Heroism**

Achilles is a very complex character. On the one hand, he has the qualities of a hero: brave, strong, and has a great purpose. But on the other hand, he is also filled with ego, anger, and revenge. He can be a savior and a destroyer, a lover and a killer. These two different perspectives make us realize that someone can be considered a hero and a villain at the same time, depending on who is judging.

Achilles' journey shows that being a hero is not just about winning on the battlefield, but also about how he deals with emotions, loss, and difficult choices. It is precisely from his inner conflict and weaknesses that we can see the most human side of him.

## **Closing Reflection**

So, is Achilles a true hero? Or just a slaughterer who is glorified for his strength? The answer may be somewhere in the middle. He is not a perfect hero, but he is not a complete monster either. He is a human being full of emotions, ambitions, and wounds.

Through this analysis, we learned that the definition of a “hero” can vary greatly depending on who is telling the story. Perspective plays a significant role in shaping our judgments. So, before we judge someone as a hero or a villain, it’s a good idea to look at the story from multiple angles.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

### **Summary of Analysis**

When we ask the question, “Is Achilles a true hero, or just a brutal killer who is praised because of his strength?” the answer isn’t simple. It’s not just black or white. Achilles is a complicated character, and the truth about him lies somewhere in the middle. He’s not the perfect image of a hero who always does the right thing, but he’s also not a complete villain or heartless monster. Instead, Achilles is shown as a real human being someone who feels deeply, someone who has dreams and desires, and someone who carries emotional wounds from his past.

Through this analysis, we’ve come to understand that being a “hero” isn’t just about fighting in battles or winning wars. It’s also about how people see you and how your story is told. In *The Silence of the Girls* by Pat Barker, we see Achilles from a different point of view through the eyes of Briseis, one of the women captured in war. This new perspective changes how we view him. Instead of seeing him only as a brave warrior, we also see his flaws, his anger, and the pain he causes to others.

This shows us that the definition of a hero is not fixed. It can change depending on who is telling the story. One person might see Achilles as a legendary fighter and a brave leader, while another might see him as a violent man who caused suffering. This difference in views teaches us an important lesson: before we judge someone as a hero or a villain, we should try to look at the story from more than one angle. Everyone has their own side of the story, and understanding those different sides can help us make a fairer and deeper judgment.

In conclusion, Achilles may not be a perfect hero, but he is not just a glorified killer either. He is a human character with strength and flaws. His story reminds us that people are complex, and so are the labels we give them. What makes someone a hero is not always clear, and it depends a lot on where we are standing when we tell the story.

### **Reader Perception and Bias**

The *Song of Achilles* presents Achilles as a true hero. He is depicted as a brave figure, loyal to Patroclus, and full of emotion. He withdrew from the war not because he was afraid, but because he felt humiliated by Agamemnon. Many readers sympathize with Achilles, especially when he experiences a deep loss after Patroclus' death. Feelings of grief and love make Achilles seem human, even though in the end he takes revenge in a cruel way.

However, in *The Silence of the Girls*, we are invited to see Achilles from the perspective of Briseis, a Trojan woman who was enslaved. In her eyes, Achilles is not a hero. He is a terrifying figure, a murderer who has destroyed his family, and a symbol of male power in war. Although Achilles sometimes shows kindness, Briseis still cannot forget the fact that she is part of the suffering that Achilles created.

This shows that the reader's perception is greatly influenced by who is the narrator. When the story comes from someone who loves Achilles, like Patroclus in *The Song of Achilles*, we can see the soft and loving side of Achilles. But when the story is told by a victim like Briseis, we see the dark side of the same figure. This is the importance of understanding bias and

perspective in reading a story.

### **The Role of Bias and Perspective**

In *The Song of Achilles*, the role of bias and perspective is central to how we see Achilles and understand his actions. Since the story is told entirely from Patroclus's point of view, everything we learn about Achilles is filtered through his eyes. Patroclus isn't just a narrator; he's someone who deeply loves Achilles. This emotional connection creates a strong bias that makes Achilles appear more kind, gentle, and human than he might seem to others. Even when Achilles makes decisions that are harmful or selfish, Patroclus tries to explain them in a way that makes us feel sympathy. His love softens the way we see Achilles.

But if the story were told by someone else, like Briseis, a woman captured during the war, or a Greek soldier, Achilles might come across very differently. Other characters might focus more on his pride, his temper, or the pain he causes. For example, in *The Silence of the Girls* by Pat Barker, Briseis gives us a much harsher view of Achilles, seeing him not just as a hero, but also as someone capable of great cruelty. This shows how much a person's story can change depending on who is telling it.

That's why bias and perspective are so powerful. They don't just affect how stories are told, they shape what we believe is true. In this case, Patroclus's bias makes us see Achilles as more than just a warrior. We see his fears, his dreams, and the emotional wounds he carries. We see him not just as a hero, and not just as a killer, but as a complicated human being. And that's the key lesson: whether someone is seen as a hero or a villain often depends on where we stand and how we feel about them. In the end, *The Song of Achilles* reminds us that people are not one-dimensional. Bias and perspective shape the truth we see. Before we label someone as a hero, it's important to ask: who's telling the story, and what do they believe? Because sometimes, understanding a person means looking through more than one lens.

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