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Crime and Punishment: Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*

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Homer's *Iliad* is commonly thought of as the story of the siege and the fall of Troy, and many, who have not yet read the book for themselves but are familiar with the name of the bard and the work ascribed to him, might be surprised to find out that the book does not feature Achilles being pierced in the ankle by Paris' arrow or, even more shockingly, that the Trojan Horse is altogether absent in the *Iliad* itself.²

The *Iliad*, however, makes it abundantly clear from as early as its very first line that the true subject of its tale is not the war itself, which really and truly becomes merely the setting in which the primary story-arc plays out, and much less its completion, but rather Achilles and his character development as a result of his quarrel with Agamemnon and its consequences.

Placed midway through Book Nine lie five beautiful lines which are instrumental in understanding this character development. Book Nine finds the Achaean forces hemmed in between the camp-fires of the jubilant Trojans encamped just outside their makeshift wooden palisade and the unforgiving 'wine-dark' Aegean Sea. Zeus has made good his promise to Thetis and has tipped the balance in the Trojans' favour. In the meantime, Achilles, spited by Agamemnon's arrogance and the confiscation of his war-captive Briseis, has held back himself and his able Myrmidons from the hard fighting.

In desperation, the other Achaean princes rendezvous to discuss their options. There they resolve to send an embassy to Achilles with promises of remuneration from Agamemnon in order to convince the despondent warrior to return to the fray and to push back the Trojan forces menacing their ships and their only hope of ever returning home.

In Book 1, Achilles was presented to the audience as a being in a state of passionate anger, ready to pounce upon his enemy and held back only by divine intervention,³ whose

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³ Hom. *Il.* 1.193f.

... [μῆνις] μὲν Ἀχαιοὺς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,
 πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
 ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν οἰωνοῖσι τε πᾶσι...⁴

Later in the same book,⁵ Achilles receives Agamemnon's envoys with surprising cordiality, a behaviour which greatly contrasts Agamemnon's vulgar and outrageous disposition towards Achilles in the opening sections of the book. This contrast, Bassett claims, serves to mark Agamemnon as the true villain of the *Iliad*.⁶

Naturally, the audience expects Agamemnon's fretful embassy to be received by either an irate and terrifying Achilles, or at least one who is cold and resentful of his mistreatment at the hands of Agamemnon. At most, the audience might expect an Achilles who is smug about the reversal of fortune that the Achaeans have experienced in his absence.

Instead, however, Homer introduces a new Achilles, a man who is well-rested, contentedly playing the lyre and singing in the presence of his companion, Patroclus. Upon receiving the embassy, Achilles shows himself the perfect host, a willing adherent to the Greek norms of ξένια. He invites the emissaries to dinner – served by a silent Patroclus – and makes small-talk. The passage presents a striking contrast to the gory fighting outside; it is as if the emissaries have crossed some magical portal into a land of peace and tranquillity, blessed with prosperity. It is as if Achilles has managed to detach his little camp from the rest of the world.

The passage seems at odds with the work as a whole and there is a general sense that it does not belong, that there is something wrong.⁷ Lines 186 to 190, although often referenced in many works, have rarely been examined on their own, but an evaluation of their own contents may help in identifying its place in Achilles' story. The lines read as follows:

Μυρμιδόνων δ' ἐπὶ τε κλισίας καὶ νῆας ἰκέσθην,
 τὸν δ' εὖρον φρένα τερπόμενον φόρμιγγι λιγείῃ
 καλῇ δαιδαλέῃ, ἐπὶ δ' ἀργύρεον ζυγὸν ἦεν,
 τὴν ἄρετ' ἐξ ἐνάρων πόλιν Ἡτίωνος ὀλέσας

⁴ Hom. Il. 1.2-5. '(Whose anger) put pains thousandfold upon the Achaeans, hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting of dogs, of all birds.' Lattimore (2011) 235.

⁵ Hom. Il. 1.334f.

⁶ Bassett (1934) 48.

⁷ O. Tsagarakis in fact mentions the view of some critics that the passage of the embassy feels so out of place that they believe the passage in its entirety to have been superimposed by later editors onto the original work, or that the passage could be seen as proof that the work had multiple authors; Tsagarakis (1971) 17.

τῇ ὃ γε θυμὸν ἔτερπεν, ἄειδε δ' ἄρα κλέα ἀνδρῶν.
Πάτροκλος δέ οἱ οἶος ἐναντίος ἦστο σιωπῇ⁸

Lattimore translates the same lines as follows:

Now they came beside the shelters and ships of the Myrmidons
and they found Achilles delighting his heart in a lyre, clear-sounding
splendid and carefully wrought, with a bridge of silver upon it,
which he won out of the spoils when he ruined Eëtion's city.
With this he was pleasuring his heart, and singing of men's fame,
as Patroklos was sitting over against him, alone, in silence.

The participle *τερπόμενον*, which Lattimore translates as 'delighting', and the verb *τέρπειν*, 'to delight' or 'to take pleasure in', are relatively common usage throughout the entire work,⁹ especially considering the subject matter. In pre-Classical literature, the verb is generally used in connection to poetry and poetic performances.¹⁰

This trend, however, does not always hold for the uses of the verb in the *Iliad*. Indeed, of the thirty-one uses of the word, eighteen have no direct connection to poetry, music or a bard.¹¹ More importantly for this study, however, the verb is always used to emphasise the otherness of the personae discussed or of the situations playing out. In fact, of the thirty-one uses of the verb, seven are used in direct relation to the gods who are separated from the common man by the very nature of their being, such as when Apollo delights in the hymns that the Achaean youth sing to him to sooth his anger in Book One.¹² That the gods, so often presented as cruelly toying with mankind, are allowed to be presented as rejoicing in the misery of men is unsurprising.¹³ Of course, in some instances, the gods do share in this misery, as when Zeus bemoans the impending and inalienable death of Sarpedon, or when the gods are wounded, but they generally stand aloof and tug the strings from backstage.

Another eight uses refer to Achilles himself, presented in situations where his distancing from the fighting Achaeans, either on a physical or emotional level, is

⁸ Hom. *Il.* 9.185-190.

⁹ The word is used thirty-one times throughout the *Iliad*, with no notable distribution pattern.

¹⁰ Some uses of the word in the works cited include Hom. *Od.* 1.347, 4.15-19, 8.542, 12.52; Hes. *Th.* 37 cf. 51; Hom. *Hymn Her.* 505-6. J.L. Ready treats the use of the verb and the relationship between the bard and his poetry and pleasure in Ready (2017) *passim*.

¹¹ Hom. *Il.* 2.774, 3.441, 4.10, 5.760, 7.61, 8.480, 9.337, 9.400, 11.643, 11.780, 14.312, 15.393, 19.18, 19.19, 19.312, 19.313, 20.23, 21.45, 23.298.

¹² Hom. *Il.* 1.474; 4.10; 5.760; 7.61; 8.480; 14.312; 20.23.

¹³ Such as at Hom. *Il.* 4.10 and 5.760.

being emphasised, as in line 312 of Book Nineteen, when Achilles' heart fails to be comforted by the company of the other princes.¹⁴ Two occur in the description of the scenes decorating Achilles' new shield.¹⁵ Another four uses refer to characters in situations that are markedly distanced from the fighting,¹⁶ with another four uses used to refer to events preceding the start of the war, as when, in Book Eleven, Nestor recounts the hospitality he and his companions had enjoyed when they had come to Peleus' palace to recruit Achilles and Patroclus to their cause, a hospitality identical to that Achilles extended to his guests in Book Nine, albeit the two embassies got far differing results.¹⁷

This leaves another six mentions worthy of their own evaluation. In the course of his speech to the delegation, Achilles uses the verb *τέρπειν* to refer to Agamemnon delighting in Briseis.¹⁸ Earlier in Book Nine, Agamemnon was led by Nestor and the other princes into practically admitting that it had been beyond wrong, in fact stupid, to take Briseis away from Achilles.¹⁹ Once again, the verb is related, therefore, to a mistake, an action that is out of line with what should have occurred.

There is the same sense of something surprisingly out-of-place occurring when, later in the same book, Diomedes exhorts the disappointed Achaean kings to retire and rest, 'now that the inward heart is made happy'.²⁰ Homer's audience, possibly hearing the epic for the first time, must have been surprised; there was nothing in Book Nine in which Diomedes' heart ought to have rejoiced. Any surprise would have soon been set aside, however, as Diomedes ignores his own advice and joins Odysseus for a heroic commando mission. And so, this episode, first placed in a place of wrongness by the use of the verb *τέρπειν*, is saved by a reversal of spirit in Diomedes. Diomedes, therefore, initially seems to jar with the narrative, but saves himself through proper heroic action that contrasts heavily with Achilles' actions in the *Iliad* since the start of the quarrel.

Τέρπειν is then used with reference to the Achaeans in Book Twenty-Four at the point at which they have just completed the funeral of Patroclus.²¹ Yet now that this becomes a community action, Achilles is again set apart, weeping

¹⁴ Hom. *Il.* 9.186; 9.189; 19.18; 19.19; 19.312; 19.313; 23.10; 23.98.

¹⁵ Hom. *Il.* 18.526; 18.604.

¹⁶ Hom. *Il.* 2.774; 3.441; 11.643; 15.393.

¹⁷ Hom. *Il.* 9.400; 11.780; 21.45; 23.298.

¹⁸ Hom. *Il.* 9.337.

¹⁹ Hom. *Il.* 9.115f.

²⁰ Lattimore (2011) 235. This action seems inappropriate in the sense that it is presented as a consequence to causes that should not have brought this result, that is, Diomedes presents the hearts of the Achaean princes rejoicing at the result of the embassy, which was ultimately a failure that did not bring about their hoped-for resolution.

²¹ Hom. *Il.* 24.3.

inconsolably alone. Once again, albeit in the completely opposite way, the verb is used to emphasise Achilles' apartness, originally on a physical level, later also on a social level, and now finally even on an emotional level.²²

The last use of the verb is significant. '*Then, when great Achilles had taken full satisfaction in sorrow and the passion for it had gone from his mind and body...*' translates Lattimore.²³ and with this near-oxymoron, Achilles' story, characterised throughout by the otherness and apartness of *τέρπειν*, is ready to come full circle and be brought to a gradual end. After this use of the verb, Achilles sets aside his varying self-inflicted separations and returns finally and truly into the common fold. All returns to the natural order of things. So much for now for *τέρπειν*.

In Book Nine, the embassy of Achaean princes finds Achilles delighting in a lyre that had been taken from Thebe, city of Eëtion, Andromache's father. Zarker recognises that Eëtion and Thebe play '*a small but continuing role*' in the *Iliad*.²⁴ It has often been theorised that there may have been another epic devoted to the sacking of Thebe or the ransacking by the Achaeans of Troy's other or allied cities.²⁵ Achilles, being the best of the Achaean warriors, would have featured prominently in any such epic, and he himself, in fact, brags that he had laid low no less than twelve cities.²⁶ Achilles at Thebe is presented as a strong and able warrior, fighting at the forefront and triumphing. He is, moreover, presented as merciful and noble since he not only ransoms Andromache's mother to her relatives, but he also affords Eëtion a dignified burial, even though it would have been perfectly permissible for him to let the corpses rot.²⁷

Moreover, just as Andromache was fated to suffer at the hands of Achilles as he assailed Thebe through the death of her male relatives, so was she fated to suffer once more at his hands at Troy through the death of Hector, whom she likens to her deceased relatives in Book 6.²⁸ This fated second bout of suffering, however, is delayed by Achilles' refusal to fight. Since he does not fight, he cannot kill Hector. Until Hector dies, Troy cannot fall. The story has come to an impasse.

²² Achilles is presented elsewhere as weeping, notably in Hom. *Il.* 1.348f. In all instances, Achilles' loneliness is emphasised. Lattimore in fact translates Hom. *Il.* 1.348-350 as follows, '...But Achilleus – weeping went and sat in sorrow apart from his companions beside the beach of the gray sea looking out on the infinite water.' Lattimore (2011) 84.

²³ Lattimore (2011) 511.

²⁴ Zarker (1965) 110.

²⁵ Zarker (1965) 111.

²⁶ Hom. *Il.* 9.328.

²⁷ S.E. Bassett makes a compelling argument against the view that Homeric society would have viewed Achilles' treatment of Hector's body following their duel in Book Twenty-Two as improper or indeed condemnable. Bassett (1933) 41f. Cf. Bassett (1923).

²⁸ Lattimore (2011) 182.

The embassy sent by the Achaean princes to Achilles is an attempt at overcoming this impasse in this story by returning all actors to their roles. And yet Homer foreshadows the failure of the embassy before the emissaries have even had chance to talk.

This is done as soon as Achilles is presented as singing. In Mycenaean and Homeric society, the bard would have enjoyed a singularly important position in society – he would have been the keeper of history, an entertainer, a sort of travelling wise-man, but also someone with a knowledge of the gods and their lives. The bard is, however and by virtue of him being a bard, not a warrior.²⁹

Redfield writes that, although, in Homer, song is presented as the common possession of the folk, and men and women are presented as singing while working, the bard enjoys a special relationship to song.³⁰ A bard could sing one of two types of songs: he could sing a well-known song meant for communal singing, in which case he became a leader within the crowd, one among the many, or songs of the heroes and the gods, in which case the bard set himself aside from the crowd, who was expected to remain quiet, as Patroclus is described as being quiet as Achilles sang.

Achilles is clearly described as singing the *κλέα ἀνδρῶν*, which seems to be the reserve of bards in Homeric society. Moreover, Patroclus' role as audience here is significant. Patroclus, despite his undivine parentage, is indispensable in driving the narrative of Achilles' story forwards throughout the *Iliad*.³¹

If it is accepted that Homer seems to be presenting Achilles as a bard, then several new issues arise. The first is that the roles of warrior, or someone who should be a warrior, at least, and that of a bard, whose role is to commemorate the warrior, are converging in a new and unique way.³²

This upsetting convergence can be explained in one of two ways. Either it is symptomatic of the general breakdown of the *status quo* started by Agamemnon when he dared take another hero's prize in Book One, or it is a sign of rebellion on Achilles' part against a societal structure that has failed him. According to his understanding of the societal structure, and Sarpedon confirms this in Book Twelve,³³ the warrior fights in defence, or forward defence in this case, of his community, and is in turn rewarded with the choicest gifts and lands. It is a

²⁹ No other hero is ever presented as singing in the same fashion as Achilles in these lines.

³⁰ Redfield (1975) 30.

³¹ D.A. Traill even goes so far as to promote some scholars' view that Patroclus was merely an invention of Homer, developed with the sole purpose of furthering Achilles' story arc. Traill (1990) 6.

³² No other hero is ever presented in such terms in any of Homer's works. The closest situation to this is when Odysseus is compared to a bard in *Odyssey* for his eloquence. Yet the fact that he is compared to a bard logically precludes him from being one. Doherty (1991) 150.

³³ Hom. *Il.* 12.310ff.

convenient and workable arrangement. And yet, Agamemnon, far his inferior at arms, having had less success in the storming of cities, confiscated his prizes with immunity, and none of the other Achaean princes intervened to right the wrong. Since the other side did not hold its end of the bargain, Achilles refuses to hold to his own and ceases to fight on behalf of his community. If one allows the possibility that Achilles may be signing off his own accomplishments – the *Iliad* itself gives no hints either way – then it may even be argued that Achilles goes one step further by providing for himself the renown through commemoration that he ought to be rewarded by but isn't.

Another issue lies in the reverence with which the bard seems to have been regarded in Homeric society. This reverence arose from a belief that the bard was divinely inspired, and it was this divine inspiration which allowed him to sing at such great lengths of the great deeds of past heroes. He has direct access to the knowledge of the gods³⁴ and is blessed by them.³⁵ If bards were blessed by the gods, and if Achilles is here presented as a bard, then the argument could be made that there is a level of divine sanction of Achilles' detachment from the rest of the Achaean army body. After all, it may be said, the entire matter was a part of Zeus' plan to confer greater glory upon Achilles, as he had agreed to do following Thetis' entreaties.³⁶ In fact, Achilles is never truly abandoned by the gods in the same way that Bellerophon features in Glaucus' story in Book Six.³⁷

A counter-argument lies in the fact that Achilles is the son of a goddess, minor though she may be, and is so straddling both mortal and divine worlds at the same time. This precludes him from complete detachment from the gods and allows him a level of access to divine knowledge and heightened awareness that a fully mortal bard can only reach through divine intervention.

It is indeed true that the demigods in the *Iliad* enjoy a certain degree of privilege and societal clear-sightedness. Sarpedon provides the clearest summary of Homeric society and the heroic code, showing a level awareness of the way society works that the fully mortal heroes, unquestioning and completely preoccupied with the war at hand, do not.³⁸ Aeneas, meanwhile, is immediately able to see through Apollo's disguise and recognise him as the divinity that he was shrouding,³⁹ just as Helen is able to recognise Aphrodite despite her disguise in Book Three.⁴⁰ Achilles also sees the gods as themselves and ends up fighting

³⁴ Hom. *Il.* 2.484-92.

³⁵ Hom. *Od.* 3.25-8; 8.477f.

³⁶ Hom. *Il.* 1.494.

³⁷ Hom. *Il.* 6.200f.

³⁸ Hom. *Il.* 12.315f.

³⁹ Hom. *Il.* 17.333.

⁴⁰ Hom. *Il.* 3.83.

one.⁴¹ Mortals such as Diomedes, however, require the gods to show themselves to them in their divine nature in order that they may recognise them.⁴²

Helen is even more similar to Achilles as represented in this passage in that she, aware that the Trojan war will be remembered through the ages, reproduces, in a way, the *κλέα ἀνδρῶν* of the present context through weaving.⁴³ Contrary to Achilles, however, she does so in a manner that was socially acceptable to Homeric society. Rather ironically, by representing Helen as weaving, Homer promotes Helen as a good wife and decorous woman, who acts in accordance with societal expectations.⁴⁴

Achilles, however, still emerges as a unique character even among his semi-divine peers by not only having a profound awareness of the society around him but outright rebelling against it following what he interprets as its failure, and becoming, in Redfield's reading, his own poet. He alone enjoys that level of '*self-reflective consciousness*' that allows this rebellion.⁴⁵

Redfield also states that 'in the embassy as throughout the poem, Achilles is less the creator of situations than their agent and victim; he does in each case what it seems to him must be done.'⁴⁶ While this can be seen to apply to the rest of the poem preceding and following this episode it seems very strange that this passage would be interpreted in this manner. It is at this point more than any other, when Achilles refuse the embassy and turns his back definitively on society's expectations, that Achilles is most the agent of his own actions, nor does this statement tally with Redfield's own assertion of Achilles' uniqueness.

By making himself a bard as well as a warrior, Achilles, already physically distant from his peers on account of his quarrel with Agamemnon, steps further away from Homeric society, and just as Agamemnon had broken the reciprocal cycle of military service in return for *τίμη* and material advancement, so does Achilles take over both sides of the reciprocal relationship between hero and bard. He, a living hero, thus seizes upon the representation of the *κλέα ἀνδρῶν* which Redfield proclaims belongs to the dead.⁴⁷ In so doing, Achilles unearths for himself the absurdity of the Homeric heroic system and from being its main proponent,

⁴¹ Hom. *Il.* 21.214ff. Later, in lines 600ff. and 22.1ff., Achilles even tries to chase down Apollo.

⁴² Diomedes in Book Five; also consider how easily Hector was deceived by Athena in Book Twenty-Two, when she showed herself to him disguised as his cousin.

⁴³ Hom. *Il.* 3.125f.

⁴⁴ In the *Odyssey*, Homer arms Penelope, forever the archetypal good wife of Homeric and Greek societies, with the weaving as a 'weapon' to preserve her faithfulness to Odysseus. In the *Iliad* itself, Hector reproaches Andromache for not being at home and orders her back to her loom and distaff in Book Six.

⁴⁵ Redfield (1975) 36.

⁴⁶ Redfield (1975) 17.

⁴⁷ Redfield (1975) 32.

he becomes its greatest critic and detractor. 'Bravery leads not to honor, as he had thought, but to death, which is the same for the coward and the hero.'⁴⁸

Far from being a mere reactionary character, the Achilles in Book Nine is an Achilles who believes himself in full control of his destiny. After all, had he not already chosen for himself when presented with the choice between a long life or a remembered one? It is Achilles who decides to refuse the embassy, and it is Achilles who pitches, unprovoked, the idea of sailing back home the next day, which he later revises to a decision to remain in his tent until his own ships are in danger. Achilles seizes his own destiny in his own hands, setting himself apart from even those most like him, the other demigods, who willingly surrender their agency and submit to societal expectations. In so doing, he steps away further from Homeric society and distances himself from the last foreseeable opportunity for rapprochement.

In this context, Achilles' indecision ought to be seen less as a weakness in the face of a destiny to which he is a victim and more as that natural confusion that is expected to afflict one upon the realisation that the rules and mores by which one has regulated one's life up to that point count for nothing. Achilles is overwhelmed by the possibility of choice in a life hitherto governed completely by the heroic code. Nor is his indecision restricted to this matter alone; when Achilles finally consents to organising the funeral of Patroclus, Achilles first orders the Myrmidons to gather the wood from about his ships on the coast but then orders the wood transported inland to a new location.⁴⁹

Nor should the fact that the story plays out as destiny intended be seen as an argument against Achilles' self-determination. Achilles could have accepted the embassy's terms, he could have sailed to Phthia on the day following the embassy, and he could have ignored Patroclus and let the Achaeans simply die. The fact that he ultimately aligns with his prescribed destiny to kill Hector and later (although not in the *Iliad*) to die himself at Troy does not undermine Achilles' ability to choose, but only emphasises the fact that it is now Achilles who chooses how the story plays out. The freedom to choose does not equate to an obligation to choose differently but makes of Achilles' path a series of events in which he is more directly involved and for which he is more responsible. Book Nine sees Achilles slowly transform from passive victim to active actor.

It is because of the impasse solidified by Achilles' response to the embassy that Patroclus must die. As a hero, it was only fitting that Patroclus should die in battle, while his death at Hector's hands, facilitated by the intervention of the god Apollo, would have all the more to be celebrated in the context of Homeric society

⁴⁸ Wilson (1938) 565.

⁴⁹ Ruggiero (1996) 9f.

for the κλέος it would have won the deceased. Patroclus' great κλέος is, however, far from Achilles' mind in his mourning.

While on the physical level, Achilles has been punished by being bereft of his greatest companion, Patroclus, his greatest punishment is, however, psychological. There is much evidence for this in the text itself. In the first place, Achilles is compelled to claim responsibility for his greatest friend's death when he states 'I must die soon, then; since I was not to stand by my companion when he was killed. And now, far away from the land of his fathers he has perished and lacked my fighting strength to defend him.'⁵⁰ More significantly, perhaps, Achilles now wants to die.⁵¹ Here, he also links his eventual death to the death of Patroclus and makes of it a punishment for his 'abandonment' of Patroclus, rather than the medium through which he gains his glory.

To a modern audience, the punishment of a seemingly innocent individual for someone else's transgression or even for their benefit might seem harsh and out of line; yet, a sense of rationale underlines this narrative. A quick consideration of Patroclus' role in the *Iliad* shows that Patroclus is, in fact, the means through which Achilles can maintain the impasse. In other words, Patroclus enables Achilles' continued detachment.

In line with Redfield's descriptions, a bard, in order to be a bard, requires a silent audience.⁵² In Book Nine, Patroclus is presented silently witnessing Achilles' singing.⁵³ Later, Patroclus acts as a medium between Achilles and the Achaeans, allowing him to get the information he desires without surrendering his complete physical detachment from them, such as when Achilles sends Patroclus to discover who among the Achaean heroes had been wounded and was being carried back to camp in Book Eleven.⁵⁴ In Book 16, by which point his anger at Agamemnon has subsided to the point that Achilles regrets the hard stance he had adopted when confronted by the embassy,⁵⁵ Patroclus and his suggestion to put on Achilles' armour provides Achilles with a way to satisfy his urge to intervene in favour with the Greeks without returning to the fighting and so solving the impasse.

Hector had to die by Achilles' hand. Achilles believed himself bound by honour not to return to the fighting.⁵⁶ The death of Patroclus not only deals away with

⁵⁰ Lattimore (2011) 399.

⁵¹ Vivante (1985) 64.

⁵² Redfield (1975) 30.

⁵³ Hom. *Il.* 9.190.

⁵⁴ Hom. *Il.* 11.598f.

⁵⁵ Schodel (1989) 91.

⁵⁶ In her 1989 paper, Schodel expounds the tragedy of the situation. Achilles, now desirous to help the Achaeans is forced by his adherence to his promise to the embassy not to return to battle. Unbeknownst to him, however, Odysseus did not report his conditions back to the council of Achaean princes. Had Achilles maintained more open communication between himself and the Achaean camp

him as an enabler of the impasse but provokes his return to the battle.⁵⁷ The story, thus, continues.

Achilles then returns to battle and the life he had led before the quarrel with Agamemnon. Yet, his interests and priorities seem to have changed; he makes only a passing reference to the honours and tribute paid to him, he seems to have forgotten Briseis entirely.⁵⁸ In fact, the prizes that he awards to the successful competitors in the funeral games he organises for Patroclus' funeral are noted by Ruggiero to be less the kind that award the greatest honour, and rather more the sort that are most useful.⁵⁹ Achilles, therefore abandons the realm of the theoretical and the immaterial (represented by the ideas of Homeric codes and concepts such as honour) and directs himself to the more pragmatic (he is angry with Hector, so he will kill him and in so doing avenge Patroclus). Moreover, he does not drink or eat, and his rest is disturbed. He is so completely consumed by his drive for vengeance that his every thought and action is directed at killing Hector. He is less human and more akin to a violent animal seeking out Hector, like a predator hunting for his prey.

Nor has he yet abandoned his extra-social position. In his conversation with Aeneas, he berates the Trojan hero and questions his blind adherence to a heroic code that will ultimately not reward him. Aeneas does not share Achilles' interest in social commentary and starts off the actual combat. Achilles nearly kills Aeneas, which would have confirmed his statement that adherence to the code leads to nothing but tragedy, except Poseidon that intervenes and saves the son of Aphrodite.⁶⁰

Achilles' *aristeia* in the later stages of the *Iliad* is also presented by Homer as significantly different to that of Diomedes in Book Five.⁶¹ Whereas Diomedes is described in simile as a guiding star, Achilles is described as a plague-carrying star. Whereas Diomedes holds back from fighting Poseidon, Achilles plunges head first into battle with a god, going beyond his mortal limits. Diomedes is presented as an

more generally, he might have known this. There would have been no obstacle to him returning to battle in Book 16. Patroclus' death could have been avoided.

⁵⁷ Schein also makes the interesting point that since Patroclus fights not for his own glory but that of Achilles, and by putting on Achilles' armour and impersonating him, Patroclus sheds his own identity and assumes that of Achilles on a metaphorical level (cf. Schein (1984) 34f.). On that level, therefore, the death of Patroclus is the death of Achilles, even more so since Achilles must now avenge his companion in the knowledge that his own death will follow suit (Hom. *Il.* 24.95f.).

⁵⁸ Wilson (1938) 569ff.

⁵⁹ Ruggiero (1996) 16.

⁶⁰ The fact that this episode is initiated by Apollo's encouragement, to the detriment of the Trojan side, and ended by Poseidon's intervention, to the detriment of the Achaean side, and therefore portraying each god as supporting the side they usually oppose, is considerably interesting, although Homer's reason in doing so is not immediately clear.

⁶¹ Schein (1984) 35.

able but disciplined warrior; Achilles is more like a destructive torrent unleashed upon the battlefield. It causes great damage, but ultimately it wears itself down.

Yet if Achilles recognises Patroclus' death as a punishment, then he necessarily must have transgressed to deserve such a punishment. Achilles identifies his crime as his absence at his friend's moment of need,⁶² yet this particular absence is itself a consequence from his continued absence from the battlefield. Had he not persisted in his anger, had he accepted the embassy's terms, had he, even at the last moment, chosen to intervene himself rather than send Patroclus in his stead, Patroclus may have lived.

Achilles' anger, however, is generally agreed to have been justified.⁶³ The Achaeans princes, Agamemnon included, must concede that Agamemnon's actions were inappropriate.⁶⁴ Zeus consents to Thetis' request to tip the balance in favour of the Trojans, a punishment upon the Achaean princes of sorts for permitting Agamemnon's unjust treatment of Achilles to proceed unchallenged.⁶⁵

Nor, Bassett claims, was he wrong in refusing the gifts that Agamemnon offered him through his embassy.⁶⁶ 'Both Agamemnon and Hector take back the words of insult spoken to Odysseus and Paris, respectively and promise atonement later.' In Achilles' case, however, 'Agamemnon offers material atonement and then, far from taking back any of his words, practically repeats the charge he made in the quarrel [in Book One].'⁶⁷ Agamemnon therefore fails – or chooses not - to understand the real cause of Achilles' anger. Achilles does not require material wealth: the spoils he can win for himself can far outweigh anything he has to offer. The lands and marriage that Agamemnon proposes are useless to a man who knows he is to die at Troy should he choose to return to the fight. What he wants, in simple terms, is an apology. Agamemnon does not deliver.⁶⁸

Nor does Bassett agree with claims that Achilles transgresses when he turns down Agamemnon's offer of the gifts through Odysseus, compounded by his refusal to heed Phoenix's words of warning.⁶⁹ The presence of the heralds in accompaniment to the embassy marks them out as an official delegation sent by Agamemnon.⁷⁰ Achilles is therefore under no obligation to accept their terms, and is justified in not doing so since Agamemnon's advances fail to recognise the root

⁶² Iliad 18.98f.

⁶³ Bassett (1933) 59.

⁶⁴ Hom. *Il.* 9.115f.

⁶⁵ Hom. *Il.* 1.503f.

⁶⁶ Bassett (1934) 59. In the same passage, Bassett offers a variety of scholarly works promoting an opposite opinion. His answers in their regard are sufficiently persuasive.

⁶⁷ Bassett (1934) 59.

⁶⁸ Bassett (1934) 60.

⁶⁹ Bassett (1934) 60.

⁷⁰ Hom. *Il.* 9.689.

issue. In fact, Achilles, when answering Odysseus, makes it clear that his refusal is to him as an envoy of Agamemnon.⁷¹

The same, however, cannot be said for his refusal to bend to Ajax's speech, however. Achilles has dismissed the embassy and Ajax recognises this in the opening lines of his speech.⁷² When he does address Achilles, it is not as envoy of Agamemnon, but as Ajax, Achilles' friend. Bassett claims that it is here that Achilles commits his ἁμαρτία.⁷³

It is the contention of the present author, however, that the ἁμαρτία of Achilles occurs much earlier in Book Nine, and is manifested precisely in line 186, when Achilles is presented as delighting himself in the lyre.

The argument for this point lies in two lines of the *Iliad* that none of the mentioned commentators have mentioned, that is Book 11 lines 652-3, when Patroclus addresses Nestor so:

εὖ δὲ σὺ οἶσθα γεραιᾷ διοτρεφές, οἷος ἐκεῖνος
δεινὸς ἀνὴρ: τάχα κεν καὶ ἀναίτιον αἰτιόωτο.⁷⁴

Bassett himself recognises that Achilles' first greeting to the ambassadors carries with it an undertone of accusation. 'There is a gentle reproach in the first words, 'My friends' – from whom I heard not a word since the beginning of the quarrel!'⁷⁵ Achilles, in part, holds the other Achaeans as guilty as Agamemnon in the generation of the quarrel, albeit by omission.

Yet, how just is this accusation? In essence, the causes of the quarrel and its consequences may be summarised so: Agamemnon errs by insulting Achilles, and the other Achaeans suffer the consequences. Yet this is not unlike the circumstances of Apollo's plague. In that case, Agamemnon insulted the god by mistreating his priest Chryses, and the Achaean rank and file suffered for nine days before Achilles, prompted by a goddess, summoned an assembly. None of the Achaean princes protested at the mistreatment of the priest in Book One. Nor did any face Agamemnon before Hera forced the matter through inspiration, even though the quick proceedings of the embassy in Book One make it abundantly clear that few were surprised by Calchas' pronouncements. The Achaean princes,

⁷¹ 'Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus: - without consideration for you I must make my answer, - the way I think, and the way it will be accomplished, that you may not come one after another, and sit by me, and speak softly. - For as I detest the doorways of Death, I detest that man, who - hides one thing in the depths of his heart and speaks forth another.' Lattimore (2011) 224.

⁷² Hom. *Il.* 9.620f.

⁷³ Bassett (1934) 67.

⁷⁴ Lattimore (2011) translates the lines as follows: 'You know yourself, aged sir beloved to Zeus, how he is; a dangerous man; he might even be angry with one who is blameless.'

⁷⁵ Bassett (1934) 67.

with the obvious exception of Achilles, are guilty by omission in the matter of Achilles' mistreatment. If anything, through the interventions of Nestor in Book One and the arguments of the Achaean princes in Book Nine, Homer shows a greater willingness to confront Agamemnon for his transgression than the Achaean princes, Achilles included, had shown, on their own initiative, on behalf of Calchas, representative of an actual god.

Why then are these two lines and the presentation of Achilles as a bard so important? Patroclus' reply to Nestor makes the claim, made all the more significant by the fact that it is spoken by Achilles' closest companion, that Achilles is all too willing to act in anger towards the innocent. In so doing, Homer subtly compares Achilles to Apollo, who also very willingly punishes the innocent Achaean soldiery – which had urged Agamemnon to accept Chryses' ransom⁷⁶ – for Agamemnon's crime.

Achilles' usurpation of the position of bard in Book Nine reinforces this comparison. As already discussed, a bard becomes so through divine inspiration, which grants the singer access to hidden or unknown knowledge. By making of himself a bard, Achilles claims a knowledge that is not bestowed upon him by divine inspiration. In claiming for himself this divine inspiration, he makes of himself something more than merely mortal, and so satisfying one of Agamemnon's chief accusations in Book One.⁷⁷

By claiming for himself the position of bard, moreover, Achilles also lays claim to a detached objectiveness that he, as a hero and so the intended subject of such works, simply cannot enjoy. Through this incorrect appropriation, Achilles distances himself further from the other Achaeans and finds in his thoughts an impermissible justification for his punishment of the innocent Achaeans, without realising that he too was equally, if not more, guilty of the same accusations that he levelled against them albeit in another case entirely. While it seems permissible in the Greek mind for the gods to punish the innocent with the guilty – there are far too many examples of this in Greek mythology to argue the opposite – there is no instance in which the mistreatment of the innocent along with the guilty by the heroes is celebrated or applauded. Achilles' ἀμαρτία lies in the fact that he appropriates for himself the undeserved position of a bard, which only the gods may bestow through inspiration, and that he allows himself the impermissible prerogatives of the gods. In other words, Achilles compares himself to a god; his crime is hubris.

Patroclus' death is the punishment which forces him first back into his mother's divine arms and then back into the folds of the army.⁷⁸ His redemption is not yet,

⁷⁶ Hom. *Il.* 1.22.

⁷⁷ Hom. *Il.* 1.286.

⁷⁸ Death is ultimately what separates the mortal from the god. Further, if one accepts Schein's claim that by putting on Achilles' armour and impersonating him, Patroclus sheds his own identity and

complete, however, and although he more than satisfies his duty to avenge his friend by slaying Hector, he finds no peace, and his sleep is troubled.⁷⁹

Achilles only rests after he receives Priam in his tent and hears his pleas. This time the ransom is accepted and Achilles bends to the divine will. In so doing, he surrenders the supra-mortal hubristic persona he had assumed for himself. All returns to as it should be, and with the last use of the verb *τέρπειν* the story of Achilles' crime and punishment is brought to a close.

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assumes that of Achilles on a metaphorical level, then the death of Patroclus may be seen as, in a way the metaphorical death of Achilles, and so a stark reminder to the latter of his own mortality. Schein (1984) 34f.

⁷⁹ Wilson (1938) 570