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Achilles Creed?

by Ana Juvan

(English 1159)

Enter classroom: Students, **John** and **David**, before the teacher shows up. They sit down at their desks and begin to discuss one of their favorite video games.

John: Hey David, did you hear about the new Assassins Creed game coming out?

David: Don't tell me it's going to be like the last one, all focused on the gore and violence.

John: What's wrong with that? You're living the exciting life of an assassin; of course you're going to be killing people left and right! That's the best part!

David: Wow, do you even hear yourself? You might as well be a caveman, dude. What about the emotional toll all that killing has to have on someone? The first game will always be the best, we got to explore the character and see his actual human side.

John: Blah blah blah, that one was too boring.

David: Alright, how about this: imagine the next game taking place in Ancient Greece-

John: Now that's what I'm talking about! Bring Achilles and the mighty Achaeans into the story to make some serious damage!

David: Yeah, like how Achilles didn't even want to fight for pretty much half of *The Iliad*?

John: Well, yeah, but then he makes up for it in raw strength later on! Don't tell me you don't remember the legendary part where Achilles is on a kill streak and was basically an unstoppable war machine. "[I]n he leapt like a frenzied god,/his heart racing with slaughter, only his sword in hand,/whirling in circles, slashing—hideous groans breaking,/fighters stabbed by the blade, water flushed with blood" (21.21-24). He's a beast! He killed so many Trojans the river even got mad at him, man. He'd make the perfect assassin.

David: Yeah and do you remember all the people who begged him for mercy? What about when Lycaon is literally begging at his knees to spare him? "[H]olding for dear life,/Lycaon burst out with a winging prayer: 'Achilles!/I hug your knees—mercy!—spare my life!'" (21.83-85). Of course, Achilles responds in a heartless way, calling him a fool and "[striking] his collarbone just beside the neck/...dark blood pouring out of him drench[ing] the earth" (21.132-135). That was harsh, dude. An assassin knows that it's not all about death; sometimes taking a life isn't the right choice, especially when you have somebody begging you for mercy. You saw how in the 4th game the main assassin would more often than not either knock someone out or just wound them well enough to leave them immobile, but decide to walk away before the kill shot. You have to know how to choose your battles to be a good assassin.

John: But remember, all that killing was done because Achilles was going crazy about Patroclus's death, his best friend.

David: Ah, yes, you're right. So now his emotions play a big part in the story as well, right?

John: Hey now, cut it out, I'm not siding with your no-violence storyline crap.

David: I'm just saying, I think the violence in *The Iliad* is so intense because Homer glorifies war, why else would he describe it in such detail? Even when minor characters die, such as when Idomeneus kills Erymas, there's still gruesome elaboration. "[T]he merciless brazen spearpoint raking through,/up under the brain to split his glistening skull--/teeth shattered out, both eyes brimmed to the lids/with a gush of blood and both nostrils spurting,/mouth gaping, blowing convulsive sprays of blood/and death's dark cloud closed down around his corpse" (16.408-413). The warriors gain a place in the plotline and are seen as valuable addition to the army once they slay

someone in a terrible, bloody way. Whereas in a good Assassins Creed game, you live all aspects of the life of an assassin and realize that there's more to it than just fighting and deaths.

John: Well don't forget, we do get to see a big emotional component of war in *The Iliad*. Often times citizens and families are weeping over the death of their loved ones, and we even get to see one instance where Achilles is actually scared of his fate as a soldier. "If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,/my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies./If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,/my pride, my glory dies.../true, but the life that's left me will be long,/the stroke of death will not come on me quickly" (9.500-505). Arguably the best soldier of the Achaeans shows he's not all brawn and courage. He's expressing the fact that he actually wants to settle down and live a normal, long life, and he knows that won't happen if he chooses to fight. This could definitely be seen as cowardly and selfish, but nevertheless he shows us the side of heroes that is not often portrayed: the always-present mentality of knowing that you could die any minute in war. He expresses his fears and acts accordingly in response to his feelings, which is often seen as weak in heroic characters. If that doesn't relate to your weird "human aspect of characters" preference, I don't know what will.

David: Alright alright, I'll give you that one. I still don't think Achilles would make a good assassin though; he lets his own personal vendetta take over his entire life and literally goes insane because of it.

John: What you call insanity, I call good battle strategy. He harnesses his grief for Patroclus and uses it to help win the war. He begins to only think about fighting, replacing basic human needs with the destruction of his enemies. "I have no taste for food—what I really crave/is slaughter and blood and the choking groans of men!" (19.255-256). That's the type of man you need to take care of business! Dedicated, confident, and powerful.

David: Okay, and then what did he do once he got his revenge?

John: Aw man, I knew you were going to bring this up...

David: He immaturely disrespected the already dead Hector in front of his whole city, filled with Hector's family and citizens who looked up to him! "[H]e was bent on outrage, on shaming noble Hector./Piercing the tendons, ankle to heel behind both feet,/...lashed them to his chariot, left the head to drag/and mounting the car, hoisting the famous arms aboard,/he whipped his team to a run and breakneck on they flew,/holding nothing back. And a thick cloud of dust rose up from the man they dragged" (22.467-473). He literally added insult to injury and dragged Hector's body around the city, making a mockery of the Trojan's now severely wounded hope. Recalling the ending of the 3rd Assassins Creed, the assassin finally killed the villain he'd been chasing the whole time, laid his body down, and closed his eyelids. He didn't have to take his victory to such a grotesque level; if Achilles were a true warrior out for justice and honor, he would've respected his enemy's body and left it for the citizens of Troy to give him a proper burial.

John: Well, yeah, but-

Teacher: Ahem.

Caught up in their discussion, they didn't realize the teacher walked in and was waiting to begin class.

John: Uh...we'll finish this up later, David.

Works Cited

Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking, 1990. Print.