

Describe and analyse the function of the depiction of Achilles' education and/or upbringing in any one or two Latin texts focussed upon in this module.

Achilles is one of greek's greatest heros. Born to Nereid Thetis and Peleus, the king of Phthia, he is mostly associated with taking part- and eventually meeting his demise- in the Trojan War in the 13th century BCE. Achilles is well known for his triumph, bravery and skill in fighting. Although it could be debated as to whether this war actually took place or not, Achilles' name is still widely known due to this famous battle. However, the only information about his earlier life that is well-known is the myth of Thetis dipping her son into the River Styx when he was a baby in order to make him immortal. It is clear, however, that many ancient sources discuss Achilles' upbringing rather well, and there is both some agreement and disagreement regarding what was the cause for Achilles to turn out how he did, with some sources referring to him as 'savage'. Both these similarities and differences will be discussed throughout the following essay, with support from both ancient and modern sources.

Firstly, it is apparent that the main argument made to be the cause of Achilles's savage personality traits is the nature vs nurture discussion. In summary, this argument ensures to discover whether specific behavioural tendencies are caused by nature (such as genetic) or nurture (such as learned) influences (McLeod, 2018). Statius' *Achilleid* is one of the main sources that discusses this argument, and it is apparent that this author states how it is possible that nature is more to blame than nurture in this case, as he clearly states how "nature is the enemy" (Bernstein, 2008). Later on in the source given, it is clear that Statius states how there are 3 main discussions in terms of nature that could have led to Achilles' behavioural tendencies, these being: Divine vs Human, Civilized vs Feral and Masculine vs Feminine.

The first of these is clear in this source, as Achilles himself would say how he was of 'divine descent' due to his mother being a sea nymph, meaning she was a god. From ancient myth, it is also apparent that both Zeus and Poseidon were pursuing his mother, until a prophecy foretold that her son would be more powerful than his father (Aeschylus, 430BC). This led to both gods backing out of their pursuit, and having Thetis marry Peleus. The fact that there was such a myth regarding who would birth Achilles clearly suggests that he was more than a normal citizen, which may therefore give him an idea that he was of divine being, rather than the normal human. This could therefore lead to Achilles having more 'savage' tendencies, as he would possibly believe that he was better than others because of his divine descent. This point is also supported where the *Achilleid* clearly states "epic praise often credits divine descent as opposed to the hero's prowess" (Bernstein, 2008). This suggests that many of the people who give Achilles praise merely do so due to his mother being a goddess, as opposed to what Achilles actually earned himself. Another reason for this praise due to his divinity could be that people

did not want to upset the gods like Zeus, who was the main god in Greece, as he initially wanted to be Achilles' dad himself, so would support him. The fact that people would not want to upset him is clear in Ancient Greece, as they were a very religious civilization, and they knew that Zeus was powerful and strict enough to punish them if he did not like what they did. It is also clear that the gods did in fact like Achilles especially, as the *Achilleid* clearly states how he had "support from the gods". This clearly shows that the extent of Achilles' mortality is widely disputed amongst the sources as they all put forward varying intensities in which way he was inclined; whether more towards the divine or human side.

The second of these three discussions that I will discuss is the Masculine vs Feminine debate. This is mostly discussed by modern-day author Neil Barchiesi, where he compares the upbringing and education of Achilles to the ideals of Ancient Rome. The first of these comparisons is where the source says that Achilles' "early life accumulates Roman anxieties about missing paternal exemplar" (Barchiesi, 2005). This was stated in an attempt to intend that in order for Achilles to become a hero, he would need to stay away from his father, whilst also simultaneously staying away from the increasing feminising influence of his mother. In summary, it is apparent that this source is stating that the nature of Achilles would set him up to be very much on the masculine side of the spectrum, in order for him to become the leader that the prophecy expected him to be. However, it is quite apparent from Barchiesi's work that Thetis- Achilles' mother- was forcing him to be more feminine, as previously mentioned. This continuous pressure from his mother would have therefore made Achilles question his own masculinity to an extent. This is most apparent during the story where Achilles' mother hides him away at the courts of the King Skyros, in order to keep him safe from the impending Trojan War. Whilst he was hidden away, Achilles was disguised as a female and was given the name "Pyrrha". The king was unaware of Achilles' true name and background, and agreed to look after him, in order for Achilles to "learn feminine ways by living with other women". Whilst he was at this location, Achilles fell in love with the king's daughter Deidamia, and eventually raped and had a child with her (Statius, n.d.). Although this gave away his true background to her, Deidamia decided to keep it a secret and still act as though Achilles was really a woman. Eventually, Achilles was discovered to be a man when another prophecy suggested that the only way the Greeks would beat Troy is if Achilles fought for them. This led to Odysseus going to Skyros to find him. Although the way in which Achilles was discovered has been debated across different sources, it is apparent that the *Achilleid* suggests that Odysseus used a technique based around warfare to discover him. This being how Odysseus offered many instruments and weapons to the women, and then having someone to pretend that an enemy invasion was about to take place. This led to Achilles grabbing the weapon in preparation to defend the land, singling him out as a man and allowing Odysseus to take him to fight. Although different sources have differing details regarding how this story took place, it is quite clear that the main plot of the story from the *Achilleid* is correct. It is quite clear that the debate of masculinity could be

brought into this example, as there are clearly references to gender throughout. For example, Achilles was sent to Skyros to protect him from the battle and for him to act as a woman, which would make him pick up more feminine traits and habits. However, when he was presented with a weapon, and an invasion was acted out, Achilles' masculine traits overcame him and he instinctively wanted to defend himself and others, proving he still had typically masculine attributes within him. Another time in this story where his stereotypical 'masculine' traits can be seen is during the rape of Deidamia. This is because the *Achilleid* suggests that Achilles could not subdue his masculine desires anymore, and had to act out on what his masculine attributes were telling him to do so, despite the fact that doing so would cause problems with the king, and could also throw away his secrecy. It is quite clear that this story is a good example to emphasise how Achilles' personality featured both masculine and feminine attributes. However, this would not be completely against the ideals of Ancient Rome. This is because it was thought of by the Romans that masculinity was inherent, yet at the same time it was also believed by the Romans that a balance of both masculinity and femininity was needed to be the 'ideal man' (Barchiesi, 2005). However, this should be done in a way that isn't too contradictory with itself. From both this point and the above points alone, it is unclear that a conclusion on the debate regarding whether Achilles was more masculine or feminine could be made. This is because, in one aspect it is stated how Achilles' nature would set him up to be masculine and to be a hero, yet the increasing pressure put on him by his mother- which would be nurture in this case- would lead to him questioning this masculinity and becoming more feminine.

The final of these three nature debates is the debate of Achilles' personality featuring more civilized or more feral aspects. This debate is most prominent in works by the modern-day author Elaine Fantham, where she is discussing the teaching carried out by Achilles' teacher Chiron, who was a centaur, a creature known for being half man and half horse. In this work, it is mentioned how many ancient sources discuss how Chiron is the reason for Achilles being more civilized, as he was able to "tame Achilles' savagery" by using artistic methods such as music and poetry. This point has been backed up by many ancient and historic sources, including Horace's *Epodes*, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Seneca's *Troades* (Fantham, 2003). It is also apparent that there are quite a few artistic paintings depicting scenes of Chiron being Achilles' teacher, including *The Education of Achilles* by James Barry in 1772, and even a Roman fresco for Herculaneum depicting Chiron teaching Achilles how to play the lyre. However, Fantham's source also mentions how some ancient sources, most notably the *Achilleid*, suggest that Chiron also helped assist Achilles's future savagery, as opposed to the other viewpoint of him helping to tame it. This could suggest that Achilles' feral personality traits could be down to a mix of both nurture and nature, as he was possibly feral to begin with, and then Chiron helped to increase this rather than calm it down. However, the reliability of this being the outcome is doubtful, as it is clear that there are far more sources that suggest that Chiron helped to tame Achilles' feral side as opposed to make it worse, as the *Achilleid* would suggest.

Another key aspect of Achilles' education that has been touched upon previously is his relationship with Chiron, his centaur teacher when he was younger. Although many sources describe how Chiron was solely Achilles' teacher and nothing more, Statius' *Achilleid* touches upon how Achilles saw Chiron as more than this, how he saw him as a potential father figure too. This is quite apparent from many parts throughout the source. Firstly, it is apparent early on in the teachings that Achilles sees Chiron as a parental figure, as the source says "the huge Centaur collapses on stone and Achilles fondly twines himself about his shoulders". The source even then goes on to say how, even though Achilles' mother is with them too, he would still curl up with Chiron, Statius referring to it as "preferring the familiar bosom". Another point that explicitly portrays Chiron as being like a father figure to Achilles is, when Chiron is on his deathbed, Achilles proclaims "don't leave me, dear father" according to Ovid's *Fasti*. This again is another clear example of Achilles seeing Chiron as a father figure, which could be seen as being done due to Achilles not having a relationship with his real father, Peleus. Achilles also referred to Chiron as his father where he says "thus that father of mine used to feed me" (Statius, n.d.). However, it is apparent that all of the above references to Chiron have come from Book One of Statius' *Achilleid* out of two. It is clear that Achilles' relationship with Chiron changes substantially in Book Two of this source. This is because this book begins to portray a different aspect of the relationship between the two- as it starts to emphasise and detail the types of tasks that Chiron would expect Achilles to carry out, in order for him to become the hero that he needed to be. The detailing of these tasks go hand in hand with an insight into the harsher ways in which Chiron would treat Achilles. For example, the *Achilleid* depicts on scenario in which Achilles was stood in a rushing river, and had Chiron throwing "savage threats" at him, as a way of negative reinforcement for Achilles to build up his resilience to abuse. Although it is likely that these threats were said in good will, they still clearly portray how stern Chiron was on Achilles, which possibly came more often as Achilles got older. The idea of Chiron carrying out his teachings in good will is also backed up by the point that Chiron helped Achilles to fix in his mind "the precepts of sacred justice" (Statius, n.d.), which was done by reminding Achilles that weapons are only used in hunting, ensuring that Achilles did not develop any savage behavioural traits. However, it is apparent that this is contradicting with the point made earlier on in this essay regarding Chiron being the cause of Achilles' feral behaviour. This therefore could suggest that, despite Chiron not intending to develop the savage behaviour from Achilles, this could have still played at least a minor role in the development of such characteristics.

Throughout my research on different sources regarding both Achilles' education and upbringing, there are many attributes I found that could be linked to Ancient Rome, whether it be the story of Romulus and Remus- the founders of Rome who were abandoned when they were babies- or stories from Ancient Rome not long after the life of Achilles. For example, it is apparent that when Chiron was first brought Achilles, he fed the boy on the marrow of

she-wolves. This could be compared to the story of Romulus and Remus, who were looked after by a wolf when they were young, and she fed them milk from her teats. This is a clear similarity between the two stories, and was mentioned by Roman authors. This was probably done in order to depict Achilles- who was a powerful and brave fighter- as being similar to Romans, in order to make them seem like they had powerful roots. Another similarity between Achilles and 1st Century Rome has previously been mentioned, in that being Achilles representing the 'ideal' Roman man, being a balance between masculine and feminine. Again, this similarity would have been done in order to make Roman people be able to relate themselves to such a well-known name. It is also apparent that many sources are able to find similarities between Achilles and Aeneas- who was seen as a direct ancestor from Romulus and Remus. Again, it is likely that these similarities would have been made in order for a relationship to be made between these two heroes, potentially in order for Roman people to feel like they are descendants from two powerful fighters, which could easily be interpreted as a technique of propaganda.

Overall, it is quite clear from the points made above that there are many sources that project the education and upbringing of Achilles. It is also quite clear that there are many debates regarding his upbringing, whether it was based mostly off of nature or nurture, as well as the effects of various influential older people that Achilles came across throughout his childhood and later youth, those of most obvious importance including his mother Thetis and his teacher Chiron. However, the reliability of some of these sources must be taken into account. This is because there are some differences between the authors, most obviously being Statius' *Achilleid* compared to other sources contemporary to this, including Horace's *Epodes*, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Seneca's *Troades*. Although the reason for these differences is unknown, the fact that there are multiple sources that all agree with a point that differs from Statius' suggests that there is more reason to interpret the other sources as correct, as opposed to Statius' *Achilleid*. However, this source does feature some similarities to the others, so it is likely it is not 100% unreliable to use.

Word Count: 2754

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