

# Heroes through History

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Everyone adores heroes. Tales of character performing heroic deeds began before writing even existed in oral stories passed down over generations. The definition of what makes a person “heroic” has evolved over time; our modern understanding of heroes differs greatly from that of the ancient Greeks. Yet despite these differences, some characters transcend the boundaries of society to become heroes immortalized in all cultures for all time.

A hero “saves the day”. From ancient times to now a special few “save the day” for everyone. True hero rise above adversity. They are selfless leaders who by their example inspire others to be the best they can be. Many times they are the first to jump into danger to help others. The heroes’ motives are usually selfless and helpful for everyone. Heroes kill the monsters who have been terrorizing everyone else.

Heroes are the central figure in their perspective stories. The story often focuses on them or is told through the heroes’ perspective. They are faced with hardships and struggles which they must overcome. Their challenges propel the story and excite the reader. The trials come in the form of the villain, the antithesis of the hero, the one who stands in the way of what the hero wants to accomplish and whom they must triumph over. Yet the antagonist does not need to be a character; it can be nature itself. Sometimes the villain that they need to conquer is the evil within the heroes themselves. The heroes will always defeat whatever the enemy is by the end of the story though the triumph may take the hero through torment. They persevere and win, usually earning a happy ending and coming through changed for the better.

I personally love heroes. I love reading how they overcome all the obstacles in their path. They hold values which are the most embodied virtues of their society. But I wonder, do societies create their own heroes? Or do heroes create societies?

Heroes have always been a part of literature. The oldest known work of literature is the ancient Mesopotamian *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. This tale introduced the character of Gilgamesh to the world as its first hero. He was a simple hero, a brave demi-god warrior-king on a quest for immortality. The Ancient Greeks who were probably influenced by Gilgamesh to create their own Greek heroes—Achilles, Hercules, Odysseus, Perseus, Jason, and the like.

Literary heroes and the stories about them have evolved over the thousands of years since *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was first orally told. The heroes of ancient times were likely to be masculine warriors who accomplish great deeds impossible for the normal man. Somewhere through history, society changed how they view heroes the definition of a hero was broadened. Perhaps this occurred because what people valued evolved. During the ancient times, the world was more harsh and violent. War and survival were the values people cared about. Therefore ancient heroes were masculine leaders who were really good at killing and fighting. As time went on, society grew more sophisticated and more moral. Heroes became more diverse than before, evolving from warriors to characters that never fight in their story at all. Yet there are still many heroes today reminiscent of the heroes of old with the superheroes from comics being great examples. Modern heroes tend to be courageous and noble people who almost always do the right thing and always want to save others even at risk of their own peril. They will face

adversity and overcome it. They are the protagonists of their stories, but their story is for everyone.

If we look at the history of the word “hero,” we can find that as heroes have evolved the definition has changed. The word “hero” actually comes from the Greek word ἥρως which means (according to Liddell at <Perseus.com>):

1. a hero, in Homer, used of the Greeks before Troy, then of warriors generally; and then of all free men of the heroic age, as the minstrel Demodocus, the herald Mulius, even the unwarlike Phaeacians.
2. heroes, as objects of worship, demigods or men born from a god and a mortal, as Hercules, Aeneas, Memnon (Herodotus, Pindar); then of such as had done great services to mankind, as Daedalus, Triptolemus, Theseus (Greek Anthology).
3. later, the heroes are inferior local deities, patrons of tribes, cities, guilds, founders of cities, etc.

Another definition(from Slater on <Perseus. com>): someone whose parent is divine, or who has accomplished outstanding achievements in legendary times.

Compare these definitions of the Greek word with Merriam-Webster’s dictionary definition. A hero is--

1. *a*: a mythological or legendary figure often of divine descent endowed with great strength or ability *b* : an illustrious warrior *c* : a man admired for his achievements and noble qualities *d* : one who shows great courage
2. *a*: the principal male character in a literary or dramatic work

Slater's definition is simple with a hero needing to have either been born with divine heritage or to have accomplished outstanding achievements. At first it appears that anyone born a demi-god and who had achieved something great would be considered a hero, but then he writes there is no true difference between "ἦρως" and "ἄνθρωπος" which is hero and man prospectively; so a hero must be a man. Liddell's three definitions also point to men and heroes being linked. The first definition is of warriors and free men in the heroic age of Homer. The second definition is the same as Slater's. The third definition is inferior local gods and leaders. Merriam-Webster's first definition is the Greek definition. The second definition is far more open. The hero is the protagonist of a story. How has the hero become to be defined as the main character?

Here are some questions I want to raise and may get around to addressing. What is it about heroes that makes people love and admire them so much? Is it their unique, sometimes supernatural abilities, their great works and deeds, their character? Through the centuries, a hero has evolved from being a godly warrior to someone who does good. Does the spirit of the hero change? Does society shape what the hero will be?

I will focus on three characters who while widely different in demeanor and abilities, are still called heroes in their perspective stories. These are Achilles, the ancient Grecian demigod warrior hero from *The Iliad*, Alyosha Karamazov, the 19th century Russian Orthodox monk from *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Superman, the Superhero from DC Comics. Why choose these three from all the countless heroes throughout the years?

Each of these characters personifies the unique societal beliefs of their author of what a hero should be. Achilles is the epitome of the original hero of Greek manliness and demigod

warrior with his mastery of all combat and weaponry, embodying war. Alyosha is a hero based on the Biblical stories of Jesus Christ with a character known for forgiveness and non-judgement. Superman is the modern hero with superpowers yet with a selfless moral compass of only using his powers for saving others.

### I. Achilles

In the *Iliad*, there are many Greek and Trojan heroes, but *the* hero of the story is Achilles. How can Achilles be considered the protagonist of the story when he is barely in it? How is he able to stand out when the story is literally about Greek heroes fighting one another? Yet he is the one whom the story revolves around. It might be set during the Trojan War, but that is merely the setting; otherwise we might have read the beginning of how the war started or the first nine years of the war. Though that would have been interesting by itself, it is not what the story is about. The ancient Greeks would be quite familiar with the entire story of the Trojan War so retelling it for this story is not necessary. *The Iliad* is about Achilles and his destiny either of immortal glory or living in peace until death in old age.

The story takes place in the last year of the Trojan War. It begins with Achilles and his anger:

Anger now be your song, immortal one,  
 Akhilleus' anger, doomed and ruinous,  
 that caused the Akhaians loss on bitter loss  
 and crowded brave souls into the undergloom,  
 leaving so many dead men—carrion  
 for dogs and birds; and the will of Zeus was done.  
 Begin it when the two men first contending  
 broke with one another— the Lord Marshal  
 Agamémnon, Atreus' son, and Prince Akhilleus.

## (Iliad Book I. 1-10)

Note the first word is “anger”—specifically Achilles’ doomed and ruinous anger. When a story begins on a certain character, it informs the reader that this character is probably important, especially when it goes on to say that his anger will influence the outcome of the story further. The beginning passage of the *Iliad* provides the summary to tell the readers (or the listeners as it was originally performed orally) exactly what they should expect from the story. Many Greek and Trojan men died because of Achilles and “the will of Zeus was done” (I. 6)

*The Iliad* begins with the quarreling between two characters Agamemnon, leader of the army, and Achilles, demigod hero of the story and greatest warrior on the Greek side. They are fighting over women, but truthfully, the cause of the fight is their pride. A plague has struck down the Greek soldiers because Apollo was angry at Agamemnon for stealing a priest of Apollo’s daughter. So after ten days, Achilles decides to call the army together and figures out the plague’s cause. Achilles only wants to know the reason for the suffering of the Greek troops, his comrades, but as he is not Commander of the Army, he cannot technically assemble the army. As he discovers the reason from a diviner, Agamemnon refuses to give up his prize. His selfish reasoning is that she is better than his own wife. If Agamemnon must give up what he considers is his, then Achilles should as well. At this point, Agamemnon is being incredibly selfish and prideful. He was the one at fault for the plague, but would not act on it. When Achilles tries to resolve the issue by discovering the reason, Agamemnon forces Achilles to give up what is most precious to him. Achilles’ only fault is that he made Agamemnon confront the issue in front of the entire army. Achilles calls him a “thick-faced, shameless, greedy fool!” (I. 175). Achilles states he had no grievance with Troy but fought because of Agamemnon and his

brother, Menelaus' desire for the return of his wife, Helen and their revenge against those who had taken her. Achilles has fought more than the Lord Marshal yet Agamemnon takes more. So why should Achilles stay and fight in this war if he will lose his treasures anyway? Agamemnon allows Achilles to desert if it so pleases him, but he will still take the girl. Achilles is enraged and is about to kill the king. He is only stopped by Athena who promises him winnings. Finally, Achilles swears that even if every Greek soldier groans that Achilles is not there. He will not return. Achilles' anger transfers from Agamemnon and unfairly to the rest of the Greek army. Achilles then complains to Thetis, his goddess mother, that Agamemnon has stolen his prize. In revenge, he wants Thetis to have Zeus take the Trojan's side because he dishonored Achilles. She agreed and does so. This causes the entire story to unfold.

This is the beginning of the book, and it portrays Achilles in a conflicting light. He is prideful and full of anger, yet it is almost justified. He almost kills the Lord Commander in his rage and only a goddess is able to stop him. Achilles' reason for his anger was Agamemnon wanted to take Briseis, which is parallel to Paris taking Helen. He, the Greeks best fighter, not only abandons the fight, he also takes his army, the legendary Myrmidons. To make matters worse, Achilles complains to his goddess mother and asks her to make Zeus, king of the gods, favor the Trojan side, the enemy he fought and killed for the entire war. Achilles wants complete humiliation of Agamemnon and if the rest of the Grecian troops suffer as well, so be it. He informs the Greeks that he will not enter the war even if they all complain. To the Ancient Greeks, these actions may have been more allowed for Achilles to be called ἥρωες, but not these are not the actions of a modern hero.

The war continues without Achilles. Zeus sides with the Trojans as he promised for Achilles. Many Grecian troops have died. The Greeks are losing without Achilles. Agamemnon realizes his error: “Troops of soldiers are worth no more than one man cherished by Zeus” (IX. 139-140). Achilles is so loved by the gods that even Zeus is willing to do as he asks. Agamemnon hopes to appease Achilles by sending Odysseus and Phoenix with many gifts of gold, horses, women and one of his own daughters for a bride. Achilles greets them as dear friends. They entreat him to come back. Achilles refuses and provides his reasoning:

I had small thanks for fighting, fighting without truce  
 against hard enemies here. The portion's equal  
 whether a man hangs back or fight his best;  
 the same respect, or lack of it, is given  
 brave man and coward. One who's active dies  
 like the do-nothing. What least thing have I  
 to show for it, for harsh days undergone  
 and my life gambled, all these years of war?

(IX. 386-394)

Achilles has fought Agamemnon's enemies for many years against skilled warriors—enemies who were not his own. He tires of the unfairness that, while he fights his hardest, someone else hangs back, yet both receive the same reward. Agamemnon betrayed Achilles' trust and Achilles will not be swayed by any new prizes, not even if he gifts him back a hundredfold. “not till [Agamemnon] pays me back full measure, pain for pain, dishonor for dishonor.” (IX. 472-473) Achilles will not relent until he has revenge and no gifts will get in the way of that. “No riches can compare with being alive.” (IX. 490). Although Achilles' anger originates from his prize being taken, he cares no more for material things; he wants to live.

Thetis tells Achilles that he is fated to die one of two deaths. One death, he stays and fights which means he will die on the battlefield gaining unfading glory. The other death is returning home with no glory but a long life. “To all the rest of you I say: ‘Sail home: you will not now see Ilion’s last hour,’” (IX. 507-508). Achilles has a choice to make: to stay, fight, and die for eternal glory or leave, go home, and live for many more years with no glory. At this point, he is telling the Greeks to back down and go home as Ilion (Troy) will not fall with Zeus’ protection. The ambassadors appeal once more to Achilles better judgement, “Value the gifts; rejoin the war; Akhaians afterward will give you a god’s honor. If you reject the gifts and then, later, enter the deadly fight, you will not be accorded the same honor, even though you turn the tide of war!” (IX. 733-738) Even being handed all the gifts and the glory he could hope for, Achilles rejects him in hatred of Agamemnon. They know Achilles will join the fight, “when the time comes, whenever his blood is up or the god rouses him.” (IX. 854-855). Diomedes speaks the truth. Achilles does indeed return to battle because of anger and the gods.

We see Achilles’ character in his refusal to return to the fight. He is stubborn. Not even the countless gifts and the return of Brises who was the main reason of Achilles fight with Agamemnon will sway Achilles. He now knows it will be his death if he steps out onto the battlefield. He is retrospective now of what he has accomplished in this war. True he has fought and defeated many enemies, but what does it account in the end for Achilles? He is destined to die on this battlefield. What is the point of material gifts and women if these things cannot be taken home. “What least thing have I / to show for it, for harsh days undergone / and my life gambled, all these years of war?” (IX. 392-394) He seems regretful for entering the war and what does he have to show for it?

The next battle after Achilles' refusal to participate is bloody for the Achaeans because of Zeus's meddling. Agamemnon is injured and flees the field and their healer is injured as well. Achilles, while not fighting, is observing from the stern of his ship. He calls Patroclus over, "soldier after my own heart" (XI. 718) to ask if the healer, Machaon, was injured as "now I think they will grovel at my knees, / our Achaean comrades begging for their lives. / The need has reached them—a need too much to bear." (XI. 719-721) Achilles wants to be begged by the Greek troops to save them. He wants to be the last possible option the Greeks have. His pride will allow for nothing less as he knows it will mean giving up his life. Patroclus obeys his great master and runs to Old Nestor, "Awesome and quick to anger, / the man who sent me here to find out who's been wounded ... Well you know, old soldier loved by the gods, / what sort of man he is—that great and terrible man. / Why, he'd leap to accuse a friend without a fault." (XI. 768-775) This is Patroclus saying this about Achilles, his best friend. He understands Achilles is quick-tempered, a great and terrible man who is quick to blame yet at the same time cares about his fellow soldiers. Nestor understands Achilles' character and hopes that if anyone can bring Achilles back into the battle, it will be Patroclus. If Achilles refuses further, then Achilles should send Patroclus into battle. Poor Patroclus does not understand what he will beg of Achilles. Perhaps if Patroclus knew of Achilles' fate, he might not have so desperately persuaded Achilles to sign his own death warrant and return to the battlefield allowing the Trojans to win the war. Achilles might have returned to his home soil and lived his life to old age. However, this action would produce no story. Patroclus must be killed for Achilles to become the hero.

Patroclus follows Nestor's advice and tries to persuade Achilles to fight or all will be lost.

But you are intractable, Achilles!  
 Pray god such anger never seizes me, such rage you nurse.  
 Cursed in your own courage! What good will a man,  
 even one in the next generation, get from you  
 unless you defend the Argives from disaster?  
 You heart of iron!

(XVI. 33-38)

Patroclus fears Achilles' rage, he can see it makes him unympathetic and it is Achilles' worst flaw. Patroclus knows Achilles' battle prowess, but if it is not used then what reason would anyone praise Achilles in the future stories. His rage makes his heart harden against the tragedy and death of his fellow soldiers. Patroclus also brings up the prophecy of Achilles' death and understands if Achilles hesitates and still refuses to fight, then he should send Patroclus and the Myrmidons to turn the tide. Achilles says, "Enough./ Let bygones be bygones now. Done is done./ How on earth can a man rage on forever?/ Still, by god, I said I would not relax my anger,/ not till the cries and carnage reached my own ships." (XVI. 68-72) Achilles wonders at his own rage- how can a man rage on forever, yet still he does not let the anger fade until the hour is truly desperate. Achilles knows they need him. He knows he should let "bygones be bygones" yet even now he still does not join; his rage will be relaxed. He is not a man who is so easily shaken from his convictions- he will not return until the carnage reaches his ships. He does allow Patroclus to go into battle with his armor and his army, the mighty Myrmidons, as long as Patroclus returns to him alive and well. This promise is not to be kept since Patroclus dies on the battlefield by Hector's hand. If Achilles had refused Patroclus' favor, would he had ever stepped

onto the battlefield again? Would he have become the hero that we still remember today? Would he have truly gone home and abandoned the war that he spent ten years fighting?

Once Achilles hears the news of his beloved friend's death, he grieves, "A black cloud of grief came shrouding over Achilles" (XVIII. 24) He beats the ground and covers soot over his handsome face. His cry of anguish is so terrible his goddess mother, Thetis, is able to hear him. When Thetis comes to comfort him, Achilles says he loved Patroclus as his own life and, "My spirit rebels-I've lost the will to live,/ to take my stand in the world of men" (XVIII. 105-106). With his dearest companion gone, Achilles loses the will to live and knows the prophecy of his death on this battle will follow true. There can be no long-lived, happy, and fulfilled life without Patroclus. Achilles blames himself for his death as he could have been fighting and defending him and his comrades. He repeats some of the words when he send out Patroclus to battle,

Enough.

Let bygones be bygones. Done is done.

Despite my anguish I will beat it down,

the fury mounting inside me, down by force.

But now I'll go and meet that murderer head-on,

that Hector who destroyed the dearest life I know.

For my own death, I'll meet it freely-

(XVIII. 131-137)

Unlike before where he was questioning his rage, now he must quench his anguish as his rage burns inside him. All Achilles can think about is Hector's death even though he knows coming after Hector's death, his will follow soon after. He does not care and will meet his death freely. As long as he gains his great glory, he will be able to lie in peace in death. Thetis knows she

cannot persuade her son to not fight, but she can provide him with armor as his was taken.

Achilles holds such presence that when he shows himself to the Trojans and lets out an enormous war cry, the Trojans all flee. The Trojans know their fortune will reverse now that Achilles will return on the battlefield. Achilles gives a speech over Patroclus' dead body stating that he too will never voyage home, but he will not die until he kills Hector.

Patroclus death is the climax of the epic poem. It is Achilles' lowest moment--his most human moment. For what could be more human than grieving over the loss of a loved one? He is weeping his heart out and dirtying his handsome visage- defiling the image of the untouchable Achilles. This is especially poignant in ancient Grecian society where they equated beauty with the good as those who were beautiful were considered blessed by the gods. Achilles, being a demigod, was handsome, but he lowered himself to a dirty human as he mourns his loss. Achilles now knows for certain he will die in the Trojan War and that immortal glory will be his prize. However glory is the last thing on Achilles' grief-driven angered mind—vengeance must come first. If one is to look at Achilles in the modern sense of a hero, they would call his need for vengeance morally unheroic as heroes usually strive for justice while villains thirst for vengeance. The Ancient Greeks had a different view of revenge. They believed it to be a form of justice unlike modern thought with Christian values which holds forgiveness to be more in line with how heroes act. The Greeks would have completely accepted Achilles need for justice.

The morning after Patroclus' death, Achilles is still sobbing and wailing over his body. Thetis brings him his new god-made armor and advises him to renounce his rage at Agamemnon. Achilles asks if it was worth all the rage and anguish for a young girl. If she had died, would fewer comrades have died? He repeats the lines "Enough. Let bygones be bygones. Done is

done. / Despite my anguish I will beat it down, / the fury mounting inside me, down by force. / Now, by god, I call a halt to all my anger - / it's wrong to keep on raging, heart inflamed forever.” (XIX 74-78). The first lines are the same as before, but where before he was swearing death on Hector, now he asks a god to quell his rage as it is wrong to continue to be so enraged. Agamemnon returns all the gifts promised to him before including the girl they fought over. At this point, Achilles does not care for the gifts whether they are given or kept by Agamemnon, especially when there is a war to wage. Odysseus asks for some patience from Achilles to wait until they have broken their fast. Achilles cares not for even food or drink as his fury still burns inside. “You talk of food? / I have no taste for food-what I really crave / is slaughter and blood and the choking groans of men!” (XIX. 253-255). Right before Achilles joins the battle, he is once-again reminded of his prophecy of doom by the horse, Roan Beauty, but Achilles does not need reminding. He understands precisely what his fate will be, but he no longer cares until his blood-lust is satisfied. Achilles is ruled by his emotions. When he feels sadness, he will sob and grieve for days. When he feels anger, there is nothing anyone can do to quell it.

Achilles joins the fight. His power is so great even the gods must join to make the fight more fair. His fighting prowess is the main reason the Greeks name him hero. No mortal can stand against Achilles especially when he driven by his anger. In fact, it takes Poseidon’s efforts to stop Achilles from simply crushing Aeneas. Poseidon reprimands Aeneas for attempting to fight against “Achilles’ overwhelming fury! - / both a better soldier and more loved by the gods.” (XX. 380-381) He continues to tell Aeneas how, with only Achilles’ death, it will be safe to fight as then no one will be able to bring Aeneas down. Achilles is so fearsome even the gods warn against fighting him as it will bring death. Achilles then slaughters all Trojans that come close

except for Hector as he is also saved by a god. Achilles knows that although Hector has been saved, he will finish him the next time. In the meantime no Trojan will be spared from his wrath. One of the Trojans, Tros, attempts to plead for his life as they are the same age. “the young fool, / he'd no idea, thinking Achilles could be swayed! / Here was a man not sweet at heart, not kind, no, / he was raging, wild- as Tros grasped his knees, / desperate, begging, Achilles slit open his liver,” (XX. 526-530). Only the immortal Greek gods can stop Achilles from killing now. He is now a killing machine.

When another Trojan, a son of Priam, begs Achilles to spare his life as Achilles did during the early years of the Trojan War, Achilles says it warms his heart to spare some lives before Patroclus' death, but now no Trojan will be able to flee from their death.

Come, friend, you too must die. Why moan about it so?  
Even Patroclus died, a far, far better man than you.  
And look, you see how handsome and powerful I am?  
The son of a great man, the mother who gave me life  
a deathless goddess. But even for me, I tell you,  
death and the strong force of fate are waiting.

(XXI. 119-124)

Achilles has no mercy left in his heart, it has turned icy with Patroclus' death. He knows the hour of his death will be coming soon and he wants to kill as many as he can. He has accepted his death and wonders why others have not as “death and the strong force of fate are waiting.” (XXI. 124) No man can outrun death- not even the ‘magnificent runner’ Achilles. He commits many gruesome atrocities in his wrathful vengeance. While these actions would be considered controversial to be labeled as heroic in modern society as war is not longer glorified— the

ancient people praised glory of death on the battlefield. He was “like a frenzied god, / his heart racing with slaughter,” (XXI. 21-22) It takes a god to slow Achilles from further slaughter as Scamander, the god of the river fights and nearly kills Achilles because he has clogged the river full of dead bodies. Achilles is such a warrior he kills enough people to clog a river which is admittedly very impressive. However Achilles is still human as shown by his almost death by Scamander. Achilles might be able to fight a god, but he cannot defeat one without help from another god. As Achilles almost drowns, he pleads with the gods blaming them, especially his mother, that he is about die a meaningless death in the river like some “pig-boy.” He wants to die in glory fighting a hero even if that hero is Hector, “the best man bred in Troy” (XXI. 316). He is saved once more by the gods who so love him; it is not his fate to be swallowed by a river. Achilles knows he will die soon, but he would like it to be in glorious battle against another hero which was promised him, not some common death.

When the fated battle between Achilles and Hector happens, they have a quick exchange where Hector promises if he kills Achilles he will not mutilate Achilles and will return his body back to his comrades. Achilles makes no promise as:

There are no binding oaths between men and lions-  
wolves and lambs can enjoy no meeting of the minds-  
they are all bent on hating each other to the death.  
So with you and me. No love between us. ...  
Now you'll pay at a stroke for all my comrades' grief,  
all you killed in the fury of your spear!

(XXII. 310-313, 320-321)

Achilles likens himself to a hunter and Hector his prey. There will be no mercy for the one who killed the man who was so precious to Achilles. He is treating Hector as lower than a human and refuses to give him the same rights that Hector just promised him. He cares not for decorum or the rules of combat. Achilles can see only one thing—complete revenge and humiliation of the one who caused his current despair and fury. Once when Hector realizes Athena is helping Achilles and he is alone fighting a man who is fighting like a god of war, does Hector accept his fate. Hector simply wants to clash in a fight that will be remembered for years to come. As he lays dying, Hector tries to reason with Achilles to not let his corpse be shamed. Achilles cares not for Hector's begging as

Beg no more, you fawning dog - begging me by my parents!  
 Would to god my rage, my fury would drive me now  
 to hack your flesh away and eat you raw-  
 such agonies you have caused me! Ransom?  
 No man alive could keep the dog-packs off you,  
 (XXII. 407-411)

With his prey in his grasp, there is nothing anyone can do that will allow for Hector to live especially after Hector was the cause of Achilles' worst agony. Achilles continues to promise he will not return him even if Priam, Hector's father, will offer his weight in gold or if Hector's mother lies on her deathbed. Hector finally understands Achilles' rage and calls Achilles, iron-heart and calls out the prophecy of Achilles' death. At the moment of Hector's death, Achilles says "Die, die! / For my own death, I'll meet it freely-whenever Zeus / and the other deathless gods would like to bring it on!" (XXII. 430-432) Perhaps it is because he is in the

middle of bloodlust and cares not for his future, Achilles further accepts his destiny of dying on this battlefield especially now when he has completed his vengeance.

After Hector's death, there are funeral games for Patroclus where Achilles is very gracious with his prizes. He even pities the last place and wants to give him the gift of second place finisher, which is something he himself experienced in the beginning of the book on the receiving end of having his prize taken. It is a little weird that Achilles would do that to someone else. Twelve days pass and Achilles is still abuses Hector's corpse. The gods reconvene to finally settle the matter and Zeus commands Thetis to tell Achilles he must return Hector's body for the King's ransom which he agrees with haste. Achilles breaks the promise to Hector that he would never release him even to his father with ransom. Only the gods can make Achilles break his promise. When Priam comes for his son, he kneels before Achilles and kisses his hand; this marvels Achilles. Priam entreats Achilles to think of his own father for how Priam has already lost all of his sons and has to "put to my lips the hands of the man who killed my son." This moves Achilles and both weep. One mourns Hector, the other for his father and Patroclus. Achilles praises Priam, calling him "iron- hearted" reminiscent of what Hector called Achilles. He commiserates on the fate of all mortals who "live on to bear such torments- the gods live free of sorrows." (Hom. XXIV. 614) He tells him to grieve no more as it will do no good as it will not bring back the dead. When Priam asks for the body at that moment, Achilles refuses fearing for his wrath. Achilles, the great runner, fears that if Priam sees the body, he will go into rage and then Achilles will also fly into fresh rage and kill the king, breaking Zeus' laws. He promises he will return the body after having it cleaned. After doing as promised, he asks how long Priam will need for the funeral and promises he will withhold the attack for that amount of time. This is

the end of the story. Although Achilles does return the body to Priam, he does not do it completely of his own volition. The Greek gods force him to return it. However, he does not do it grudgingly; once he promises to return the corpse, he does it properly by cleaning it and allowing time for Troy to hold their funeral rites which will last for days. Achilles does not need to honorably keep this promise of giving Troy time to mourn, as he has only promised Zeus to return Hector's corpse. In the end, his actions are more heroic.

When I first read *The Iliad*, I thought it strange that the timing of the story is set near the end of the Trojan War, with its actual ending being Hector's funeral as the last book of the epic poem. I understand the Greeks would have known the entire story of the Trojan War, but the stories were lost to time. It is still especially strange to me how the story which began with Achilles did not end with his death as prophesied through the entire story. I was stumped by this strange story the first and second time I read *The Iliad*. By thinking of Achilles being 'the hero' of the story, it has come to make sense. In most stories of heroes, heroes will experience their lowest points in the climax of the stories, but will always overcome them and end the story on a high point. Achilles loses his greatest friend as his lowest point, but is able to gain justice against his friend's killer. Achilles is unsatisfied with merely his death, and needs to hurl abuse against the poor corpse of Hector for several days despite the Greeks commanding him to stop. Although our modern sensibility of heroes would probably not allow the hero to kill and abuse the cadaver for many days, Achilles is a hero by the Greek definition. No matter what morally horrendous acts he does (which go against all the rules of ancient warfare), he is an amazing warrior with a goddess for a mother and the story revolves around him. He is blessed with an almost immortal body, beauty and is the master of all combat. He even saves the Greeks from complete loss. One

of his main features is that he is loved by the gods. It truly shows- he is the reason Zeus and the other Greek gods turn the tide of the war. When Achilles was sulking, the gods did not involve themselves too much on order from Zeus. However in the last true battle of the story when Achilles finally enters the battlefield, all the gods partake. Achilles might not be a hero modern people will take example from, but he is still a great hero.

## II. Alyosha Karamazov

Before I begin on Alyosha Karamazov, I would like to speak on a historical figure who had great influence on the heroes afterwards. I am speaking about the Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ. That the world as we know it has been shaped by His teachings even those who do not believe in Him would agree. It is no surprise that the stories about Jesus have influenced our ideas of heroism and influenced stories told since. Many heroes now can be considered 'Christ-like' whether in their words or actions. A character can now be a hero without needing to be a great warrior. The Christ-like hero has entered the scene.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* was published in 1880, several thousands of years since Homer's *The Iliad*. Much has happened in the world in that time. Empires literally rose up and fell between when these two works were published. Millions of people were born and died in the amount of time. It is no surprise that storytelling also changed and with it, the components of storytelling like the hero changed with it. The very definition of hero changed from demigod warrior to protagonist though what has not changed is how society adores the hero. Achilles was the hero for Ancient Greece, a harsher time where society revered warriors and gods acted human-like. Alyosha Karamazov was the hero for 19th century Russia, where

Russia was still an Empire and several decades away from Revolution. Most Russians were Russian Orthodox and therefore Christians. Alyosha is a different hero compared to Achilles, which we shall see as we examine his character through his story.

Fyodor Dostoevsky finished *The Brothers Karamazov* in the final months of his life. It was the culmination and the end of his career. Somehow he knew this story would be his last, but he must have regretted not being able to truly finish the story of the Karamazov Family as he states in the author's foreword that not only was there supposed to be a sequel, but that this novel was set as a prequel. Though this story stands by itself because the sequel will unfortunately never happen, it stands to reason the character of Alyosha would still have grown as both character and hero. Nonetheless, we must judge on what is presented to us. The foreword asks what is so remarkable about Alyosha that the narrator would call him hero. He calls him a leader in the making, immature, modest and a queer yet original character. He is original not by being apart from commonality, but by being near the very heart of commonality. He wonders what reader would be willing to read not just one story on his strange hero, but two.

It may be important to remember that Alexey was the name of Dostoevsky's youngest child. Alyosha (Alexey's nickname) died very young, less than three years of age while Fyodor Dostoevsky was writing *The Brothers Karamazov*. The writing was published only published two years after the boy's death. It makes sense Dostoevsky may have shaped how he wrote Alyosha Karamazov from his son. It is also important that the narrator seems to be a combination of some townspeople and Dostoevsky as there are moments when the narrator speaks in first

person and there are moments where the narrator knows the titular character's innermost thoughts.

The story starts explaining the Karamazov Family, the main characters of the novel. The father is Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, a brutish landowner who cares for only money, women, and himself. The eldest son is Dmitri Fyodorovich Karamazov, a deeply passionate and temperamental military man. The second son is Ivan Fyodorovich Karamazov, a brilliant student who cannot reason why a loving God would cause unjust suffering on Earth. Finally there is Alexey Fyodorovich Karamazov, a novice monk who is gentle, loving and wise with simple faith in God and genuine love for mankind. As the narrator begins his introduction on his future hero, he writes Alyosha is the most difficult to explain in the introduction. The narrator says it is a queer fact that Alyosha is wearing the cassock of a novice who has been one for a year and quite willing to stay one for his entire life. He explains Alyosha is not a monk because he is a fanatic or mystic, but simply from an early age he loved humanity:

He adopted the monastic life was simply because at that time it struck him, so to say, as the ideal escape for his soul struggling from the darkness of worldly wickedness to the light of love. And the reason this life struck him in this way was that he found in it at that time, as he thought, an extraordinary being, our celebrated elder, Zossima, to whom he became attached with all the warm first love of his ardent heart. But I do not dispute that he was very strange even at that time, and had been so indeed from his cradle. (Dostoevsky. I. 4)

This is our first introduction to our future hero, and it is interesting to note that the narrator considers Alyosha not yet a hero. Also Alyosha is the most difficult to introduce for the narrator. Is it perhaps Alyosha has not become a hero yet where the challenge lies? Or perhaps it is Alexei's character in which he would adopt a monastic life that is queer to the narrator?

Alyosha's earliest memory is of his mother snatching and squeezing him while praying to the Mother of God. He remembers her as being "frenzied but beautiful" (Dost. I. 4) Could this have caused his simple faith in God? The narrator continues to describe Alyosha as quiet "from a sort of inner preoccupation entirely personal and unconcerned with other people, but so important to him that he seemed, as it were, to forget others on account of it" (Dost. I. 4) It sounds as if he prays or thinks and is so absorbed in whatever innermost thing that he completely forgets about others. The narrator assures us he is fond of people and wholeheartedly trusts people. These people did not think him a fool or naive because he makes them feel that he does not despise anyone and instead accepts all. Even his father, Fyodor Pavlovich, who can be considered a base unloveable human being, grows to love Alyosha with real genuine affection "such as he had never been capable of feeling for any one before" (Dost. I. 4) Alyosha is the only person capable of making his father feel such a pure emotion for someone other than himself. Naturally everyone loved him anywhere he went. This gift of making others love him was inherent from young age, "in his very being so to speak". (Dost. I. 4) Even at school he is serene and even-tempered and would never hold a grudge.

Another peculiarity of his is "he seemed scarcely to know the value of money, not, of course, in a literal sense." (Dost. I. 4) He is almost like a fool for Christ, who, if suddenly in possession of a vast fortune, would have no qualms about giving some away to anyone who asks whether the good or the bad. When given unasked-for pocket money he would either keep it for weeks with no plan to use it or he would be careless with it. Alyosha's patron and benefactor, Yefim Petrovich, said Alyosha is a person who could find himself in a large city and would be fed and sheltered at once; and the ones giving shelter would look on it as a pleasure to serve him.

Alyosha strangely did not finish school even though he was only a year short. He just had a strange feeling in his soul that he needed “to see his father about a plan which had occurred to him.” (Dost. I.4) He followed what his heart told him even though he was so close to finishing school and most likely could easily have graduated. It is understood one of the reasons he returned to his father’s home was to see his mother’s grave yet once he is in front of her grave he “showed no particular emotion at the sight of his mother’s grave.” (Dost. I.4) and would only return the next year. I wonder what Alyosha was thinking when he gazed at what was the mother he hardly knew. Perhaps he may have prayed for her or thought back to his childhood memory of her.

When Alyosha suddenly announces not long after visiting his mother’s resting place that he wants to join the nearby monastery which is also willing to take him as a novice, his father’s response is:

And do you know I'm sorry to lose you, Alyosha; would you believe it, I've really grown fond of you? Well, it's a good opportunity. You'll pray for us sinners; we have sinned too much here. I've always been thinking who would pray for me, and whether there's any one in the world to do it. My dear boy, (Dost. I. 4)

His father is truly fond of Alyosha. He knows Elder Zosima was special to Alyosha and would not deny him. He might not be a man that wholly believes or prays but he knows Alyosha will because Alyosha is “like an angel, nothing touches you. And I dare say nothing will touch you there... I feel that you're the only creature in the world who has not condemned me.” (Dost. I. 4) Even Fyodor Pavlovich can feel Alyosha’s non-judgemental character. Alyosha is the only person to have made Fyodor actually care for another person other than himself. This is Alyosha’s power.

The narrator paints a pleasing picture. “Alyosha was at this time a well-grown, red-cheeked, clear-eyed lad of nineteen, radiant with health. He was very handsome, too, graceful, moderately tall, with hair of a dark brown, with a regular, rather long, oval-shaped face, and wide-set dark gray, shining eyes; he was very thoughtful, and apparently very serene.” (Dost. I. 5) This is unlike the sickly, ecstatic, poorly developed creature that perhaps the narrator believed the reader was picturing Alyosha. It does not surprise me that Alyosha is handsome. One of the traits many heroes have is their good looks. Perhaps the Greek idea of good equaling beauty permeates through history. The good guy is handsome, while the bad guy is ugly. The narrator calls Alyosha a realist, “The genuine realist, if he is an unbeliever, will always find strength and ability to disbelieve in the miraculous, and if he is confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact he would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact...Faith does not, in the realist, spring from the miracle but the miracle from faith.” (Dost. I. 5) This paints an interesting picture of Alyosha as unlike what the reader may have pictured him, he is a handsome realist who still has faith. He accepts life for what it is and still believes in the miraculous. The narrator once more repeats that Alyosha was not stupid for not finishing school, but that at the time, “it alone struck his imagination and presented itself to him as offering an ideal means of escape for his soul from darkness to light.” (Dost. I. 5). When he reflected seriously he was convinced of God and immortality and said to himself, “I want to live for immortality, and I will accept no compromise.” (Dost. I. 5) Alyosha is portrayed as somewhat conflicted being a firm believer and a realist. He believes in both what he can and cannot see equally.

A moment that truly showcases Alyosha’s character is when he meets the school children. While walking on the streets, he spots a group of schoolboys going home and since Alyosha is

fond of children, he talks with them. His love of children is like Jesus' love for children. He notices rocks in their hands, but instead of remarking on it instead comments about the schoolboy's satchel since, "One must begin in a serious, businesslike way so as to be on a perfectly equal footing. Alyosha understood it by instinct." (Dost. IV. 3) Alexei talks with the children as equals. He does not talk above them as adults sometimes do with children. When they start throwing rocks at a poor boy across the street named Ilyusha and he at them, one of the rocks flies straight at Alyosha and hits him painfully on the shoulder. The boys shout, "He aimed it at you, he meant it for you. You are Karamazov, Karamazov!" (Dost. IV. 3) The boys say that Alyosha was hit on purpose because of who his family is, because he must be the similar to his father and deserved the stone. Later, it is discovered the boy hit Alyosha because Dmitri fought with Ilyusha's father. Once they begin attacking at once, our Russian hero berates them for ganging up on the poor boy and shields him even though this same boy who he is protecting is the same one who just threw a rock at him. When he questions why the schoolboys are throwing rocks at the boy, they answer the boy is a beast, he stabbed another boy, he will hurt Alyosha if he goes near him. When Alyosha approaches the boy with no intent to beat or hurt him, but instead to ask why the boy would intentionally throw a stone at him as Alyosha has done nothing to the boy. When Alyosha receives no answer except to leave, he does as the boy asks, but when he turns around the boy throws a stone at his back. Alyosha turns to face him and the boy attempts to hit his face, but Alyosha blocks it with his elbow. Even after being attacked, Alyosha only wants to know why the boy is attacking him. Ilyusha waits for Alyosha to return the attack and Alyosha does not. Ilyusha attacks him in mad rage and bites him. The bite is long, deep and

bleeds profusely. Instead of beating the child who attacked him unprovoked, Alyosha calmly wraps his hand and raises his gentle eyes and says:

“Very well, you see how badly you've bitten me. That's enough, isn't it? Now tell me, what have I done to you?” The boy stared in amazement. “Though I don't know you and it's the first time I've seen you,” Alyosha went on with the same serenity, “yet I must have done something to you—you wouldn't have hurt me like this for nothing. So what have I done? How have I wronged you, tell me?” (Dost. IV. 3)

Alyosha's nature is forgiving. He cares not for the pain of his own bleeding hand, but the hurt that he somehow wronged a child enough so that child would wish to cause him injury. Alyosha never once raises his hand against Ilyusha, it is simply not in his nature to be so cruel. After the boy runs away wailing, Alyosha's only thought is to find the boy and solve the mystery.

After these events, Alyosha finds the boy and his unfortunate circumstances. He befriends all the boys and somehow makes the boys who threw stones at each other care for one another and be friends with each other. The last chapter of the story is dedicated to Alyosha and these boys who are at Ilusha's funeral. Alyosha gives these boys hope for the future. To always remember the memory of being good and kind even if they later become wicked. Alyosha is teaching the next generation faith and love.

Rakitin, a young seminary student, who was also at the meeting between Elder Zosima and the Karamazov family cannot believe in Alyosha's purity. He wonders if Alyosha has any of the Karamazov sensuality since they carry it like a disease. Rakitin describes Alyosha as he sees him,

Oh, you virgin soul! You're a quiet one, Alyosha, you're a saint, I know, but the devil only knows what you've thought about, and what you know already! You are pure, but you've been down into the depths.... I've been watching you a long time. You're a Karamazov yourself; you're a thorough

Karamazov— no doubt birth and selection have something to answer for. You're a sensualist from your father, a crazy saint from your mother.”

(Dost. II. 7)

Although this is a description from a character who wants to see Alyosha as corrupted, even he sees the saintly characteristics of Alyosha. He then tempts Alyosha to come visit Grushenka, He calls Alyosha a sensualist and this is not the first time this happens, yet I cannot find any moment where he is sensualist like his father or brothers. He is called Karamazov, yet he does not truly act like a Karamazov. Rakitin believes the root of all Karamazov is they are both “grasping sensualists and saintly fools!” (Dost. II. 7) Perhaps this is true for the other members of the Karamazov clan with Fyodor, Dmitri and Ivan.

The death of the elder Zosima along with his quick corruption upsets Alyosha. Although, he knew the death was coming while listening to his final words, Alyosha was expecting miracles from the dead elder’s body and not corruption. Alyosha is found weeping in front of a monk’s tombstone and no words the monk who finds him brings any comfort. The narrator actually brings up the idea of being a hero:

I should, of course, have omitted all mention of it in my story, if it had not exerted a very strong influence on the heart and soul of the chief, though future, hero of my story, Alyosha, forming a crisis and turning-point in his spiritual development, giving a shock to his intellect, which finally strengthened it for the rest of his life and gave it a definite aim.

(Dost. VII. 1)

He writes “chief, though future, hero of my story”. It is interesting that he considers him a future hero, but not now. Does Alyosha become the hero after suffering and overcoming this crisis or was the narrator referring to the fact that he will not become a hero until the planned sequel? Alyosha is in deep despair after the corruption was

confirmed. He thinks it was unfair that God would return the man he held most dear with corruption. "It was justice, justice, he thirsted for, not simply miracles." (Dost. VII. 1) Alyosha does not need the corpse to perform miracles like the rest of the Russian folk. He wants the man whom he exalted above all others to be given glory, but instead is cast down and dishonored.

Even had there been no miracles, had there been nothing marvelous to justify his hopes, why this indignity, why this humiliation, why this premature decay, "in excess of nature," as the spiteful monks said? ... Where is the finger of Providence? Why did Providence hide its face "at the most critical moment" (so Alyosha thought it), as though voluntarily submitting to the blind, dumb, pitiless laws of nature?

(Dost. VII. 2)

Because Elder Zosima's body smelled so badly, everyone reversed their opinion on the monk. Where they expected miracles to come from the man they believed to be a saint, they got the opposite and many proclaimed it meant God had forsaken this man as evil. Alyosha who steadfastly believed and loved God was suddenly murmuring against him expressing ideas his brother Ivan placed in his head against a Good God. After this he even drinks vodka and eats sausage which is against the vows of a monk. He even wants to visit Grushenka.

Grushenka is a character Alyosha helps to grow into a better person. Grushenka is introduced as willful and capricious and the object of desire of both Fyodor and Dmitri. She suffers from desertion from her previous lover, yet stays faithful to him for many years. She is the reason those two fight one another because she dangles both men which causes jealousy. She feels guilt after learning of Fyodor's death as she feels responsible. Dmitri is willing to give everything to be with Grushenka. After Alyosha is disheartened by the corruption of Elder

Zosima's body, Rakitin, in an attempt to corrupt our hero, takes him to Grushenka. While they talk, Grushenka sits on his lap to perhaps seduce him as well as the other Karamazov family:

I love Alyosha in a different way. It's true, Alyosha, I had sly designs on you before. For I am horrid, violent creature. But at other times I've looked upon you, Alyosha, as my conscience. I've kept thinking 'how any one like that must despise a nasty thing like me.' Would you believe it, I sometimes look at you and feel ashamed, utterly ashamed of myself....

(Dost. VII. 3)

She admits to having sly designs for Alyosha initially, but as she spends time talking with Alyosha, she feels ashamed. Alyosha only needs to be himself to impact her this way. After she hears why Alyosha is so morose, she immediately hops off his lap. Alyosha says,

"Rakitin," he said suddenly, in a firm and loud voice; "don't taunt me with having rebelled against God. I don't want to feel angry with you, so you must be kinder, too, I've lost a treasure such as you have never had, and you cannot judge me now. You had much better look at her—do you see how she has pity on me? I came here to find a wicked soul—I felt drawn to evil because I was base and evil myself, and I've found a true sister, I have found a treasure—a loving heart. She had pity on me just now.... Agrafena Alexandrovna, I am speaking of you. You've raised my soul from the depths."

(Dost. VII. 3)

Alyosha only decides to visit Grushenka at Rakitin's request because he feels lost after the loss of the elder. Alyosha "rebelled" because he told Rakitin that he does not "accept His world". He never actually explains what he means by this comment. It shows even Alyosha's faith can be tested. Alyosha calls himself evil and base and wants Grushenka to be evil as well. Instead, Alyosha and Grushenka find salvation in each other. Grushenka is able to confess her sins and she is able with Alyosha's help to forgive the

man who deserted her. She herself does not know why Alyosha is able to cause such an effect on her.

“I don't know what he said to me, it went straight to my heart; he has wrung my heart.... He is the first, the only one who has pitied me, that's what it is. Why did you not come before, you angel?” She fell on her knees before him as though in a sudden frenzy. “I've been waiting all my life for someone like you, I knew that someone like you would come and forgive me. I believed that, nasty as I am, someone would really love me, not only with a shameful love!”

“What have I done to you?” answered Alyosha, bending over her with a tender smile, and gently taking her by the hands; “I only gave you an onion, nothing but a tiny little onion, that was all!”

(Dost VII. 3)

All Grushenka needs is someone to pity her. Alyosha instinctively knows what he needs to do and say to comfort the woman. Everyone who Alyosha makes an impact on always call him an angel. He is their guardian angel—the protector of their soul. Alyosha replies he only gave her a tiny onion which is a callback to the story she recently told. The Onion story is about an evil woman who never did any good deeds except hand a beggar an onion. In order for the woman to be saved, she must be pulled by the onion. However, the evil woman fails when she selfishly tries to save only herself. The onion is a little good deed that must be given to another for its effect. Alyosha giving Grushenka the onion saves both of them.

Alyosha Karamazov helps anyone in any way he can. He loves humanity from his very being. In many ways he is Achilles' opposite. He is a hero but not through amazing heroic deeds or combat. His most important feature is his empathy and willingness to

forgive. He does not judge anyone on their actions or words. It is these characteristics that the other characters gravitate towards him and call him 'angel'.

Achilles is a hero aspired because he is the greatest warrior of his time and he has done many great feats of strength and valour. The Greeks probably loved listening to his many tales. However, Achilles as a character today would not be viewed completely as heroic with his rage and murder and desecration of Hector's corpse (which was viewed as terrible by the other characters in the story.) The Greeks probably used his tales to warn against anger. On the completely different end of the spectrum, Alyosha Karamazov does not have any great feats or amazing accomplishments; his character is what makes him heroic. His character helps those around him become more loving and forgiving. Dostoevsky probably believed this was the hero Russia needed. The events leading up to the start of the Russian Revolution of 1905 (the Russian Revolution in 1917, a result from 1905) were coming not long after Dostoevsky finished *The Brothers Karamazov*. Alternatively, Alyosha may be so Christ-like because he was based on Dostoevsky's dead son, Alyosha.

### III. Superman

There is a group of heroes who are one of my biggest reasons for studying a hero in the first place: the superheroes. As in the name, they have all the qualities of being heroic with the added bonus of superpowers. Superheroes dedicate their lives to being superheroes. For many it is their secret job, as they may have "regular jobs" as well. It is why so many superheroes have secret identities. The most important reason for a secret identity is to protect their loved ones from the supervillains that superheroes constantly fight. To protect the superheroes' loved ones

and the city they live in is the motivation of most superheroes. The superhero who best embodies the tropes of being hero and super is Superman.

Superman has the best qualities of Achilles and Alyosha. He has the godlike abilities and accomplishments of Achilles while also having the kind and humble character from Alyosha who inspires others to be better. I believe Superman is the Hero for the modern era. There are not many who do not know his story and fewer who do not know him. He was created in 1933 by writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster who sold him to DC comics. He debuted in his first comic, Action Comics #1, in 1938. His popularity causes Superman to appear in various radio serials, newspaper strips, television programs, films, and video games. He is still considered the archetype of the superhero and has been called the Greatest Hero of All Time. His story is simple, but timeless. Born Kal-El of Krypton, he was rocketed to Earth as a baby as his home planet exploded. He was found and raised by humble farmers, Jonathan and Martha Kent as Clark Kent with a strong moral compass. He became a journalist in Metropolis (essentially New York), while also secretly saving the day as Superman using his many superpowered abilities: superhuman strength, speed, durability, and longevity; flight; heat vision; freezing breath; extrasensory powers, including X-ray vision.

His powers make him super, but it is his actions that make him a hero. In the DC comics universe, Superman is one of the most powerful superheroes in his universe. He restrains himself constantly so as to never kill or seriously hurt the one he is fighting. A great quote made by Superman as he was fighting Darkseid (worshipped as the “God of Evil” and supreme monarch of an entire planet, Apokolips.)

That man won't quit as long as he can still draw a breath. None of my teammates will. Me? I've got a different problem. I feel like I live in a world made of cardboard, always taking constant care not to break something, to break someone. Never allowing myself to lose control even for a moment, or someone could die. But you can take it, can't you, big man? What we have here is a rare opportunity for me to cut loose and show you just how powerful I really am."

(Justice League Unlimited)

Right before this quote was said, Superman is being utterly overpowered and Batman intervenes while the villain is asking why they do not quit as it is hopeless for men to beat a god. As Superman speaks he punches Darkseid so hard he flies through several buildings. Even against a supervillain he restrains his power. (Naturally Superman's restraint helps cause conflict and tension as otherwise the story would be over much too quickly if Superman let his powers be free.) Superman is extremely powerful with powers and skills men could dream of, but it is his moral code that is his strongest reason for being called Hero.

One of Superman's key characters is his secret identity. He is both mild-mannered journalist Clark Kent and superhero alien who fights for truth, justice and the American way, Superman. On the surface, the only change between the two personas is a pair of glasses, but his character is different. As Superman, he is a powerful, confident, amicable superbeing who defeats the villains and saves the day. As Clark Kent, he is humble, perceived weak, polite and nerdy. Clark is Superman's practice in humility, which is important for a character as powerful as he is. If he wanted, Superman could easily be worshipped as a god. He only wants to help and protect humanity. There have been stories where Superman can be considered evil or villainous like *Red Son* where Superman lands in Communist Russia and fights for Stalin and socialism or like *Injustice: Gods Among Us* where the Joker tricks Superman into killing his wife, son and

Metropolis, the city he protects, with a nuke and he becomes the world's tyrant. In the first example, Superman never becomes Clark Kent and is imbued with a moral code to do good because he is raised in a different environment. In the second, Clark Kent's life died when everyone Superman protected died, in essence his humanity died. Just like Jesus Christ has two natures of God and Man, Superman also has two natures.

Unlike Alyosha Karamazov or Homer's Achilles who were written solely by one writer and therefore one main source for their character, Superman's story has been told, retold, reinterpreted into all forms of medium by many different writers and artists. Superman has changed over the 80 years since he first appeared. Originally Superman was not as powerful as many of his powers were made up when the story demanded it. There are also moments of Superman being cruel and abusive. However as the times and artists changed, Superman was softened to follow a moral code of never killing and working within the law being called "big blue boy scout." Superman was constantly changing to fit with how the writers believed Superman should act.

#### IV. Conclusion

There will always be heroes. New hero stories are being made for the next generation with the characteristics the writer believes people of the time will most value and appreciate. Ancient heroes were written as strong masculine warriors to fit with what their society valued at the time. As time moved forward the values of war and fighting lessened to give way to heroes who would never harm another person. Superheroes became the hero of today what the ancient hero was back then. Superheroes are incredibly popular especially with the modern market. As I

write this, the blockbuster movie Marvel's *Avengers: Infinity War* was released last weekend. It broke all box office records proving how popular and loved these superheroes are. What makes them heroes may change, but the spirit of heroism that will live on.

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