

## Abstract

### *autika tethnaiēn*: Achilles' Guilt and Grief

The speeches made to Achilles and Patroclus in books 9 and 11 of the *Iliad* form two diptychs with books 18 and 23, respectively and represent two distinct emotional cycles for Achilles – guilt and grief – in response to Patroclus' death. Books 9 and 18 portray Achilles in a state of guilt or making the decisions which will lead to his guilt; these passages generally deal with Achilles' personal choices and his direct responsibility for Patroclus' fate through what I refer to as an internal cycle. Books 11 and 23 establish the circumstances for Achilles' grief and his eventual transition from guilt to grief. The passages here deal with conversations and motivations separate from Achilles and are therefore referred to as the external cycle. Between each pair of interlocking cycles, book 16 serves as a pivot-point between each cycle's establishment and resolution. Patroclus' arming scene, his *aristeia*, and his death, provide resolutions to the concepts introduced in books 9 and 11 and allow for Achilles' responses to these concepts to take form in books 18 and 23. While book 16 operates outside the direct thematic interactions of 9 and 18 or 11 and 23, it provides necessary context for the shift from the action of the earlier books to the later books. Book 16 serves as a natural threshold, not only for the change it produces in Achilles' behavior, but also for the change in the relationship and physical/social roles of Achilles and Patroclus.

Phoenix's speech to Achilles in book 9, in which he implores Achilles to return to the army and to restore his own honor, sets the conditions for Achilles' guilt later on and so opens the cycle. The two defining elements of Phoenix's address are the allegory of the *Litai* and the parable of Meleager; these digressions foreshadow Achilles' reactions in book 18 and address the major thematic elements of Achilles' predicament (9.502-512). In Phoenix's tale,

the *Litai* symbolize Agamemnon's embassy, *Ate* is likewise representative of Achilles' anger and Agamemnon's theft – in either case, the cause of each man's ruin is his apparent inability to consider the greater effect of his actions. However, this is not simple acknowledgment of the situation and the difficulties it presents; it is a clear warning to Achilles. If the *Litai* are denied, then further sorrows will be brought down upon the transgressor; in Achilles' case, "that ἄτη will manifest itself in the death of his beloved Patroclus" (Rosner 320).

In the opening lines of book 18, the predictions of Phoenix's allegorical digression come true – the *Litai* have caught up to Achilles and are distributing the punishment for his *Ate*, namely the death of Patroclus. We can see evidence of Achilles' guilt for this in his speech to Thetis in the immediate aftermath of his being informed of Patroclus' death (18.98-106), and in his conversation with Iris during the battle for Patroclus' body (18.170-180). He acknowledges the corruption of his actions and his hand in Patroclus' death. The desperation of the situation caused by Achilles (in an effort to stave off *Ate*) allowed for the circumstances of Patroclus' destruction. This is in evident response to the allegorical progress of the *Litai* and *Ate* of the speech in book 9.

The sense of guilt in these passages is more significant than grief, despite the descriptions of physical or performative grief (18.23-30). Grief should be considered a secondary emotion throughout book 18 because of Achilles' unwillingness to complete Patroclus' funeral rites until he has delivered on his promise to kill Hector (18.90-93). His perversions of proper grieving rituals may be considered analogous to the corruption of his grief into guilt. Rather, Achilles' grief establishes itself through speeches in books 11 and 23. Nestor's speech to Patroclus in book 11 demonstrates significant parallels both stylistically and thematically with Achilles' behavior at Patroclus' funeral and his interaction with Patroclus' ghost in book 23.

By Patroclus' funeral games in book 23, Achilles has assuaged his earlier feelings of guilt by killing Hector and initiating the process of his own death. His grief, as opposed to his guilt, is the result of a process that has occurred outside of Achilles, beginning with Nestor's plea to Patroclus in book 11 (11.762-789) and culminating in book 23 with the entreaty from Patroclus' ghost (23.100-110). This scene in book 23 also serves to end the process of dehumanization for Achilles – completing Patroclus' funeral rites completes his cycle of guilt and allows him to begin the process which will later be completed in book 24.

### Bibliography

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