

HOMER ON COURAGE

The *Iliad* is not a melodrama, where the good guys are all good and the bad guys all bad (as is the case with the *Odyssey*). *Iliad* is at once pro-war (it glorifies the battlefield where men win glory) and anti-war (it is graphic and shows us the casualties). Achilles is both the greatest warrior of all time and the first pacifist, who becomes something of a conscientious objector. Troy is supposed to be the enemy, but Homer makes us love Troy and fear the Greeks: we see Troy as a place of domestic peace, unlike the Greek camp. We like Hector more than Achilles.

In Hector & Achilles, we see two different kinds of courage. Hector shows courage by staying true to what society expects of him; Achilles shows courage by breaking those expectations. Two key scenes, where heroes show their respective courage: 1) Book 6.369-529: Hector says farewell to Andromache; Book 9: Achilles refuses the gifts.

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Hector sees battle turning against him and goes in for 3 reasons: 1) to get his mother to pray to Athena; 2) rouse up Paris to fight; 3) say goodbye to his wife. He is met by 3 women (mother, sister, wife), who all try to get him to stay within the walls, but he must go back to fight with his men. He runs to domestic place to find wife; she to tower: they meet at gate. Entire scene hangs on threshold, a frozen moment in time—he loves his wife; she is not chattel. We learn that Hector's nickname for Astyanax is Scamandrios. Tragic that his own strength, his good qualities, do him in. In fact, he embodies all that is good about Troy (as Lee did for South). When he dies, Troy will die with him. He has a terrible decision to make that is *not* easy for him.

Hector, like all tragic and epic heroes, is inscribed within a circle where he must balance duties and fates that press down with his own will pressing out (2 Cor. 4:8-9). He bears burden of past (live up to patronymic), present (live up to epithet), and future (worries about what others will say about him when he's dead). He has learned to be valiant; it's been instilled in him as it must in a pre-law society. What he's internalized is *aidos* (shame) & *nemesis* (blame).

Supreme human moment as Hector takes off helmet, kisses son, and laughs. This is a true dilemma: he must either go or stay (he will not run off to "Canada"). How to solve dilemma? Literature as Equipment for Living (Kenneth Burke): literature (especially proverbs) provides us with strategies for dealing with difficult dilemmas. We fall back on these strategies in times of crisis. Given "microcosm" of the *Iliad*, how does Hector choose, if he is to be a hero.

In second speech to his wife, he falls back on two strategies: 1) he has his death day which he cannot escape (true of Koran); 2) he and she must do their duty (like dharma in Hindu Gita). He will be true to himself no matter the outcome. As long as he and Andromache stay within their spheres, they will find balance in a mad world; when Hector dies, Andromache is working at loom. *Iliad* VI ends with Type A Hector calling on lazy Paris. As a man of duty and honor, he cannot understand his coldness and lack of concern for men who are dying for him. He's ashamed of his irresponsible younger brother yet loves & defends him & feels sorrow when others criticize him.

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Why do the Greek (and Trojan) soldiers fight? They fight to gain honor, but who's to say who has most honor? He has most honor who has most meeds of honor (war booty like armor, gold, horses, captive women). Since they're all mortal, they want to gain as much honor as they can before they die—by accumulating meeds. When Agamemnon steals away Achilles' meed (Briseis), he steals his honor, and Achilles pulls out. When Agam. sends Odysseus, Aias, and Phoinix with a huge number of meeds, everyone expects that Achilles will take the offer and return. Phoinix, his old tutor, explains that no one has been mad yet at Achilles but that now he must take the gifts and return—and then tells a tale of Meleagros to illustrate his point (513-605). But Achilles has been thinking strange new thoughts while out of the war (between Books 1 and 9) and has come up with a new ethic different than the meeds of honor.

He explains that fate is the same for cowards and brave men (318-320), that no one can put a price tag on human life (400-403), and that he has intrinsic value because he is alive (606-610). These ideas are inconceivable to the soldiers. Homer's world is not ready for this new ethic, and no one understands Achilles. Achilles himself doesn't fully understand, for he is a soldier rather than a thinker. He also has no support group to discuss his ideas with. Tragically, when Patroclus is killed, Achilles throws out his new ethic, and the world will have to wait for Socrates (and then Jesus!) to suggest such an ethic. But Achilles shows courage in trying to fashion it.

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