

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

UNFAIR TO HECTOR?

It is one of the puzzling features of the *Iliad* that while Homer undoubtedly depicts Trojan heroes, notably Hector and Priam, in a favorable light in domestic scenes, Trojans in general, and Hector in particular, are not allowed to shine on the battlefield with the luster one expects. Thus, though most modern readers readily admire Priam for the wisdom and compassion he shows in his delicate scene with Helen in Book 3, and Hector for his love and concern for Andromache and Astyanax in the beautiful scene at the Scaean Gate, they experience a certain sense of disappointment when Hector fares so poorly in his single combat with Ajax and in his fighting against other Greek heroes. This reaction, I suggest, is not inappropriate and “modern,” for the logic of the *Iliad*’s plot requires that Hector should rank second only to Achilles in prowess: otherwise, what is all the fuss about when Achilles withdraws? We are therefore entitled to ask why Homer does not allow Hector to defeat Ajax and why he makes it clear that not only Achilles and Ajax but also Diomedes and Agamemnon are better warriors than Hector.¹ This paper, in exploring these questions, will argue that Homer is more concerned with safeguarding the reputation of his Greek heroes than with being fair to Hector or scrupulously observing the needs of the plot. M. van der Valk, whose studies these findings confirm and refine, has referred to this phenomenon as Homeric “nationalism,” though “philhellenism,” as the scholiasts call it, is perhaps a more appropriate term.² More particularly, I will try to show how Homer is careful to compensate his Greek heroes when he puts them in situations that could be seen as detrimental to their τιμή.³

Let us consider first the encounter between Hector and Diomedes in 11. 349–67. Diomedes resolves to stand firm before Hector’s onslaught. Throwing his spear, he strikes Hector’s helmet and stuns him. Hector falls back, drops to one knee, and remains dazed for a while. When he recovers, he leaps into his chariot and drives back from the front. Diomedes taunts him, saying that once again Apollo has intervened to save him. This episode clearly depicts Diomedes as the superior warrior.

1. The second question is raised by M. M. Willcock, *The “Iliad” of Homer I–XII* (London, 1978), p. 303, and *A Companion to the “Iliad”* (Chicago, 1976), p. 128.

2. “Homer’s Nationalistic Attitude,” *AClass* 22 (1953): 5–26, and “Homer’s Nationalism, Again,” *Mnemosyne* 38 (1985): 373–76; though van der Valk’s thesis seems to me irrefutable, the examples he has chosen to illustrate it are not the most convincing. For an answer to van der Valk, see J. Kakridis, “Homer, ein Philhellene?” *WS* 69 (1956): 26–32. For the scholiasts’ frequent references to Homer’s philhellenism, see the index entry in H. Erbse, ed., *Scholia Graeca in Homeri “Iliadem,”* vol. 6 (Berlin, 1983), p. 520.

3. On Homer’s concern for compensating his heroes for loss of τιμή, see now D. A. Traill, “Gold Armor for Bronze and Homer’s Use of Compensatory TIMH,” *CP* 84 (1989): 301–5.

Book 11 opens with the *aristeia* of Agamemnon (lines 15–247). In the course of the *aristeia* Zeus becomes concerned for the safety of Hector. He sends Iris to advise Hector to keep out of the fighting until Agamemnon is wounded; Hector promptly complies (181–94). The withdrawal of Hector in effect forms the climax to Agamemnon's *aristeia*: so formidable a fighter is Agamemnon that even Hector has to keep out of his way. The reader is left to infer that as a warrior Hector is inferior to Agamemnon.

Why does Homer go out of his way in these passages to imply that Hector is no match for either Diomedes or Agamemnon? The tactic is all the more surprising because at this point in the *Iliad*, shortly after the failed embassy to Achilles, the plot seems to require that Hector be seen as posing a formidable threat to the Greeks—and indeed, that is the theme of Book 11 as a whole. But there is another, clearly related problem. In Book 11 Diomedes and Agamemnon are wounded along with other Greek heroes, notably Odysseus and Machaon. They are not wounded by Hector, however, as we might have expected, but by minor Trojan warriors—Paris, Coön, and Socus. Why is this? Clearly, Homer is reluctant to let Hector shine in battle at the expense of major Greek heroes. But can we be more specific? Let us consider how Diomedes and Agamemnon are wounded.

Diomedes is wounded (368–95) just a few lines after he stuns Hector and forces him to retreat. Particularly interesting are the lengths to which Homer goes to ensure that the *τιμή* earned by the Trojans is minimal. Diomedes is wounded while stripping the armor from a Trojan he has just killed. He is struck in the foot by an arrow shot by Paris. Bows have low status in the *Iliad*,⁴ and Homer has already made it clear that Paris is noted for his prowess in the bedroom rather than on the battlefield. Moreover, the shot is fired from the vantage-point of Ilus' tomb, where Paris is hiding behind a stele, out of harm's way. Given Diomedes' preoccupation and Paris' reputation, location, and weapon, the shot is clearly a cowardly one. Besides, the wound is not serious. Accordingly, no one can infer from this incident that Paris is a better warrior than Diomedes. To make the situation abundantly clear Homer has Diomedes mock Paris as follows (389–90):

οὐκ ἄλέγω, ὥς εἴ με γυνὴ βάλοι ἢ πάϊς ἄφρων·
κωφὸν γὰρ βέλους ἀνδρὸς ἀνάλκιδος οὐτιδανοῖο.

A similar pattern is found in the wounding of Agamemnon. The Trojan hero, Coön, comes from the side, unobserved, and stabs Agamemnon in the forearm (251–52). Again, the wound is not serious, the Trojan hero insignificant, and the blow cowardly. No one would infer that Coön is a better fighter than Agamemnon. To make assurance doubly sure, Homer has Agamemnon turn around, stab Coön with his spear, and lop off his head (256–61).

The scenes in which Diomedes and Agamemnon are wounded are therefore rather similar. Homer takes considerable pains to ensure that the Trojans derive little glory from them. Why does he do this? The answer is readily seen if we

4. This is clear from: the association of the bow with warriors of low standing, such as Paris and Pandarus, and its absence from the armor of warriors of high standing; Pandarus' words of regret that he had not heeded his father's advice to take a chariot and horses to Troy rather than his bow (5. 192–205); Diomedes' scornful words to Paris (quoted below) when Paris wounds him.

imagine for a moment how we would react if it were Hector who wounded either of these two heroes in a face-to-face encounter. We would naturally conclude that he was the better warrior. Such a conclusion, though virtually indispensable to his plot, Homer takes great care to exclude. His motive is, to my mind, unmistakable. He is anxious to protect the reputation of the Greek leaders. It is this same sensitivity that leads him to indicate—just before he sets them up to be wounded—that both Agamemnon and Diomedes are better warriors than Hector. The *τιμή* they earn from this distinction compensates for the loss of *τιμή* that inevitably ensues from their being wounded.

The duel between Ajax and Hector (7. 200–312), which seems to be a doublet of the duel between Menelaus and Hector, has long troubled commentators. With dry humor Leaf outlines the problem: "It is in itself somewhat surprising that two duels should be fought on the same day; but when we remember the very remarkable manner in which the first had ended, by an unpardonable violation of a truce made with all possible solemnities, and then find that the second is entered upon by the two parties without apology or reproach, the difficulty is one which can hardly be explained."⁵ C. M. Bowra attempts a rather lame explanation for the two duels: "The answer is surely that the theme was so popular that it deserved to be treated more than once, and of course simple audiences have no objection to repetitions of this kind."⁶ The solution becomes clear, I think, once we see the duel between Hector and Ajax in the light of Hector's scenes with Diomedes and Agamemnon in Book 11.

The plot of the *Iliad* is particularly unflattering to Ajax. Given his high status as a warrior, he might be expected to step in after Achilles' withdrawal and save the Greeks. The plot, however, will not allow this. At the beginning of Book 8, when Zeus gives the advantage to the Trojans, Ajax is forced to retreat along with the rest of the Greeks (79). Accordingly, in preparation for this, Homer contrives the duel with Hector in order to protect Ajax' reputation. Although the outcome of the fight is officially a draw, it is painfully clear (e.g., at 262, 271, 312) that Ajax is the superior warrior. The pattern we have noted in Book 11 is therefore followed here. Homer puts his Greek hero in a position where he can demonstrate his superiority over Hector just before he is to be subjected to a significant humiliation. These humiliations cannot be avoided, for they are woven into the plot. Zeus must grant temporary victory to the Trojans, to comply with Thetis' request; and the Greek heroes must be wounded, to precipitate Patroclus' return to battle. In each case Homer compensates for the blow to the Greek hero's *τιμή* by providing him with a victory over Hector.

If this view of Homer as a philhellene is correct, one might well expect to find that in those situations where Hector is allowed victories over significant Greek heroes, these victories prove to be somehow compromised. Let us therefore examine his victories over Patroclus and Teucer. It is, of course, in the death of Patroclus (16. 788–867) that Hector achieves his greatest victory.⁷ The modern

5. *Homer: The "Iliad,"* vol. 1 (London, 1900), p. 406.

6. "Composition," in *A Companion to Homer*, ed. A. J. B. Wace and F. H. Stubbings (London, 1962), p. 54. See also the discussion in G. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 217.

7. For a helpful discussion of this passage, see M. W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the "Iliad"* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 263–65. Richard Janko very kindly let me see an advance copy of his excellent commentary on *Il.* 13–16, for which I am extremely grateful.

reader is therefore surprised and somewhat disappointed to find that he is not allowed to win it without assistance. Before Hector confronts Patroclus, Apollo first stuns the Greek hero and strips him of his armor, and Euphorbus stabs him in the back with his spear. The reader's instinctive reaction that these interventions detract from Hector's glory finds confirmation in the speech of the dying Patroclus, who pointedly observes that Hector is only his third killer (850).⁸ Presumably, Homer was free to compose an encounter in which Hector slew Patroclus unaided. That he did not do so shows that here, too, Homer's interest is focused on the Greek hero and his τιμή rather than on Hector.

Hector's only other victory over a significant Greek hero occurs in Book 8. At the beginning of the book Zeus gives the advantage to the Trojans. All the Greek heroes retreat in confusion until they are rallied by Agamemnon (217–65). At this point the only Greek who has much success is Teucer, the half-brother of Ajax. Teucer is an archer, who darts out from behind his brother's shield, shoots, and then quickly retires behind the shield again. In his efforts to shoot Hector he kills Hector's brother Gergythion and charioteer Archeptolemus. Hector becomes so enraged that he hurls a great stone at Teucer, wounding him in the collar-bone. Ajax rushes forward to protect his brother and the wounded hero is promptly carried back to the ships (266–334).

Hector's victory over Teucer is his most significant encounter in the course of his successful advance against the Greeks. Immediately after this episode Hector forces the Greeks back across the ditch, hemming them in between the ditch and their ships (338–49). It is this crisis that prompts the embassy to Achilles in Book 9. It seems clear that Homer chose to underline Hector's success by giving him a victory over a significant Greek hero at this critical juncture. Since he did not wish to compromise the reputation of any of the heroes of the first rank—Agamemnon, Ajax, or Diomedes—Teucer was selected. It can be no accident that Teucer, like Paris, is an archer. Like Paris, too, he hides out of harm's way between shots (269–70):

αὐτὰρ ὁ αὐτὶς ἰὼν, πάϊς ὥς ὑπὸ μητέρα, δύσκειν
εἰς Αἴανθ'· ὁ δέ μιν σάκει κρύπτασκε φαινῶ.

This is scarcely a flattering picture. Another unfortunate detail about Teucer is his birth. As Agamemnon rather tactlessly reminds him when he urges Teucer on to shoot Hector, Teucer is a bastard (284). It is difficult to understand the point of these unflattering elements in the characterization of Teucer if they are not to be seen as diminishing his heroic status in preparation for Hector's victory over him.

Generations of readers have rightly admired the *Iliad* for the remarkably generous way in which the Trojans, who are after all the enemy, are portrayed. This deserved reputation for "fairness," however, should not blind us to the inescapable fact that Homer does not permit Hector to demonstrate his prowess against the leading Greek heroes to the degree we would expect and as the logic

8. Cf. Edwards, *Homer*, p. 265: "it seems clear that Apollo's intervention against Patroclus, besides his prior wounding by Euphorbus, deprives Hector of much of the glory of his slaying, for Patroclus's last words draw attention to the point." Similarly Janko and other commentators.

of the plot seems to require. Though allowed to wreak general havoc on the Greeks and to kill numbers of insignificant individuals, he is granted victories over only two significant heroes, Patroclus and Teucer, and both these victories are, as we have seen, deliberately tainted. Conversely, Homer uses Hector as a kind of whipping-boy for Ajax, Agamemnon, and Diomedes when the requirements of the plot risk compromising their reputations. Victories over Hector compensate for the loss of τιμή they are forced to incur.

Homer did not compose the *Iliad* with a disinterested, international, twentieth-century audience in mind. He composed and performed for a contemporary Greek audience, for whom the Greek heroes were vital figures of awe and veneration. It seems clear that this audience had certain expectations about how their great heroes would fare on the battlefield, and that these expectations did not include defeat by an enemy hero, no matter how distinguished.⁹ It would be foolish to criticize Homer for bending his plot a little in order to respect these expectations. It would be surprising if he did not share them himself.¹⁰

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9. Patroclus is, of course, a special case. It is perhaps significant, however, that he seems not to have a tradition independent of Homer. Some scholars believe that he is Homer's invention.

10. An earlier version of this paper was given at the annual meeting of the American Philological Association in December 1989 in Boston. It has been improved by the informed discussion of the participants at the session and by the suggestions of Richard Janko and the Editor, to all of whom I express my thanks.

ARCHIMEDES *ANTHOLOGIA PALATINA* 7. 50

τὴν Εὐριπίδew μήτ' ἔρχew, μήτ' ἐπιβάλλου,
δύσβατον ἀνθρώποις οἶμον, ἀοιδoθέτα·
λείη μὲν γὰρ ἰδεῖν καὶ †ἐπίρροθος†, ἣν δέ τις αὐτῇν
εἰσβαίνει, χαλεποῦ τρηχυτέρη σκόλοπος.
ἦν δὲ τὰ Μηδεΐης Αἰήτιδος ἄκρα χαράξης,
ἀμνήμων κείσῃ νέρθεν· ἔα στεφάνου.

This epigram is Archimedes 1 in D. L. Page, ed., *Further Greek Epigrams* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 24–25. W. M. Calder, III (*CP* 84 [1989]: 234–35) has brought to light an unpublished emendation by Wilamowitz (contained in a postcard addressed to W. R. Paton in 1914) of the corrupt ἐπίρροθος in line 3. Wilamowitz was not impressed by Paton's conjecture ἐπίκροτος (which had already occurred independently to Dorville and Brunck), and himself very tentatively proposed ἐπίρροπος—but he may have taken a deliberate decision not to publish the idea.

I once thought of ἐπίδρομος, “suitable for traveling over” (as in, e.g., Antip. Thess. *Anth. Pal.* 9. 58. 1 ἐπίδρομον ἄρμασι τεῖχος); this was mentioned by