

The iliad: the role of shame in trojan society in relation to hector essay

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To understand the Trojan people is to identify what drives them and the code they live by, and that is honor. This is true for every one of Homer's heroes as well as most of the heroes we encounter in mythology. The heroes of the Trojan War are extremely conscious of their actions and often criticize themselves for ghastly decisions made as honor is given only by the people watching in the sidelines.

To be awarded with the highest honor, one must emerge victorious in the bloodiest of battles with the enemy's armor in hand. Lesser honor is bestowed if one is adept at athletic games and hunting. An even lesser honor is given to persons engaging in heroic activity of the non-physical kind. With this in mind, let us further delve into one of the most important people in the Trojan nation, Hector.

Hector is the mightiest combatant of the Trojan defense force. But like any hero he had his flaws, especially toward the epic's end. At some point he showed a certain weakness when he fled Great Ajax and only recovered after his courage was challenged by comrades Glaucus and Aeneas. The second time he displayed this cowardly failing it was his uncle who flayed him for his fear and again Hector was urged by shame to return to battle. Although Hector at times proved overly rash and insufficiently cautious, he does not come across as haughty or imperious, as was Agamemnon. The fact that Hector fights in his homeland, unlike any of the Greek commanders, portrayed him as an affectionate, family-oriented man. Hector showed deep, earnest love for his wife and children. He even treated his brother Paris with

indulgence, despite the man's lack of fortitude and penchant for lovemaking over duty to country.

Hector never became violent with him, merely aimed aggravated words at his spineless brother. Although Hector loved his family, he never lost sight of his responsibility to Troy. Though he did run from Achilles at first and briefly entertained the expectation of negotiating his way out of a duel, he stood up to the mighty warrior anyway even to his death.

His refusal to run away even in the face of greatly superior forces and apparent abandonment of the gods made him the most tragic figure in the poem. Hector's cowardly displays made him all the more human because not everybody is made of steel. His character is a refreshing departure from the half-human half-god offspring who manifested extraordinary feats of strength such as Hercules. He was alternately fearless and weak at the same time, which makes for an interesting comparison to the other heroes of Homer's epics. One probably cannot reconcile duty towards family and duty for country and which one takes precedence, but in Homer's universe it was certainly duty and honor for country that was paramount. Again it is Trojan honor code that comes to play, a value that propels any Trojan hero to act so.

As mentioned previously, an honorable hero in the Trojan nation is determined neither by military rank or social class but rather by the greatness of his physical ability and daring in battle or any event of note. Hector comes across as an imperfect individual, with great love for family

and country both. But this fallibility is a boon to him, for it eventually molds him as a worldly person as opposed to a human with ethereal qualities.