

Honor and glory in the iliad research papers examples

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Honor and glory were central themes in the Iliad, this was displayed by how the readers are to perceive the heroes in the story. Heroic warriors were the ones who were brave, fought well and defended their name. Whatever it was they were fighting for, they had their own cause which they would demonstrate through their actions, speech and loyalty (Kraft, Kayan and Luce 163). These things were not given freely as seen in the Iliad, honor and glory were gained through years of fighting and experience. Battles, conquering lands and even the ownership of women were opportunities for these men to show how great they were. A theme which was central for characters of the Iliad was honor and glory.

“ Yes, old sir, all this you have said is fair and orderly. Yet here is a man who wishes to be above all others, who wishes to hold power over all, and to be lord of all, and give them their orders, yet I think one will not obey him.” (1. 286-289).

Agamemnon was speaking to Achilles, making his complaint, he spoke about honor and power. Although having power over a number of people is important, and something that Achilles aimed for, Agamemnon made a point in saying that there is no glory in that ambition if no one will want to listen to him. The underlying factor in their contest was of political authority, making it clear that not only power is important, but also honor. Although bravery and skill is shown on the battlefield, there are some things that need to be earned.

Since reputation and pride were seen as important parts in the story, the warriors needed a way to prove themselves (Fenik). A way to do this was through competition - this was how the warriors will get their glory, no

matter how brief, and they will bring honor to their name. Excelling on the battle field was very important, this was a way of showing athleticism and skill. Not only were they battling over this, they were seen to compete with each other with ability, speech, political authority and material prizes. The only time that anyone in the story wanted someone to succeed was when Hektor prayed to the gods that his son will become a fine and skilled warrior, one that is better than him (Burgess 15). Other than that, everyone wanted to be the best at everything. No matter which side they were on, they wanted to be the best. They wanted honor and glory to befall upon them.

“ But when he let the great voice go from his chest, and the words came drifting down like the winter snows, then no other mortal man beside could stand up against Odysseus.’ (3. 216-223).

Antenor praised Odysseus for his speaking ability. Not only did they compete on the battlefield, but it seemed as if every aspect of being a warrior was something to fight for. This included loyalty, political standing and their speeches. Although these two did not go into competition that was direct and head-to-head, you can feel the tension in the room as if they were competing in an underlying way.

This honor, glory and social status is very important to ancient Greeks (Kraft, Kayan and Luce 163). This is seen in the instance when Thersites, a man who was considered a commoner, one who was not liked by a lot of people suggested that the army should return home. Odysseus, who was a respected fighter, known for his speech and social standing did not agree. He found it pointless to go to war and come home empty-handed. Since he didn't agree with what Thersites said, he struck the man down for the

pleasure of the crowd. Because he was of a high status and he was a known warrior who was skilled, this lends sufficient weight in his argument (Burgess 2). Without an equivalent status, the man he struck could barely retort. This example shows that the honor and glory of a certain person can very well contribute to the respect and influence of his commands, no matter how irrational they were.

These things, honor and glory, were very important to the Ancient Greeks because their social status was not something considered “fixed”. Your social status would be seen to correlate with your access to power. Warriors had this access because their positions were not merely given to them. They had to prove their worth on the battlefield. However, since this is not fixed, it was easy for leadership to be transferred and even easier to lose your social standing when honor or glory is stripped away from you.

Gaining both honor and glory is not simple for any of these men since the means of gaining such things can be conflicting (Stanley). Status and respect from people are gained through courage in battle, loyalty and speech. Hektor and Achilles were both great warriors who won the respect of people long before the quarrel between two lands started. Achilles’ influence on the army was so great that when he chose to abstain from fighting, the whole army decided to back down, too. Hektor, on the other hand, was considered courageous and the bravest fighter of the Trojans. He demonstrated this by expressing his willingness to battle in order to defend his people. This is in comparison to Paris, his brother who instigated the war in the first place. He had to be dragged out to fight, and during battle he crawled away from his enemies (Wright). This was seen as a shameful thing for the Trojans, and it

suggested that he had a weak character. Even his own people had no respect for what he did.

The possession of women was seen as something that stood for a man's honor (Kraft, Kayan and Luce 163). The fact that Helen was "taken" by Paris was enough to wage a war. This was also seen when Achilles' woman was taken from him. Although the possession of material things and of women do define honor, family and community play a significant role. There was a struggle between the two men, Agamemnon and Achilles, since they had different views, but they all respected their families and they both knew what honor was. Agamemnon fought for his country and for his own pride. Family and community honor are seen in the opposing characters of Paris and Hektor. Hektor is undoubtedly the brave one whom everyone looks up to, while Paris is cowardice, one who sneaks away with other men's possessions. Achilles' revenge for his friend Patroclus shows honor that is in between family and community. However, Priam shows the greatest respect in coming back for his son's body. He does not dishonor his family by begging because he does this in the name of his family. Since there is universal respect for such honor and bravery, Achilles agrees, even though he still wanted to fight Troy in the morning.

Throughout the story of the Iliad, honor and glory are resounding themes that define the heroes. The opposing characters, the actions and speech of the heroes clearly show what is most important in the Ancient Greek culture. Gaining honor, keeping it and preserving it for one's family are seen as things that are to be pursued.

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