# LIKE A WOMAN:
# HECTOR AND THE BOUNDARIES OF MASCULINITY

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*For Nate Greenberg and Jim Helm*

> "But why does my heart within me debate these things?
> I might approach him as a suppliant and he not pity me
> nor respect me in any way, but kill me instead in my nakedness,
> like a woman, since I would have stripped off my armor.
> Nor is there any way from an oak or a rock
> to babble to him the things a boy and girl do,
> what a boy and girl say when they flirt."[1]
>
> *Iliad* 22.122–28

In the midst of his final, definitive monologue, Hector turns wistfully away from the hard necessities of the moment to imagine a different world. There boys and girls flirt in the shade of a spring; there he can shed his armor and talk like a woman. But that protected space, which surfaces again fleetingly in the hut of Achilles in Book 24, cannot long survive the relentless masculine drive for status that so dominates the *Iliad*. In Hector's mind, as in the aftermath of the poem, the beauties of peace and intimacy are immediately swept aside by the force of destruction. Commentators have been drawn to the enigmatic phrase "from an oak or a rock," but, for me, the heart of this speech is in the verb *oarizein*, usually translated as "to chat or gossip." For

1 All translations are my own.



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me, as for Hector, the prospect of a vacation from the need to reassert, endlessly, my right to exist, is sweet.[2]

The verb is cognate with *oar*, "wife," the etymology suggesting that to *oarizein* is basically to "talk like a wife." In his last moments, Hector tries out the dream of bringing Achilles into a sheltered feminine space. But his rhetoric is dominated by the other world, and so the vignette of young lovers comes after the dismal picture of Hector, "like a woman," stripped of his protective armor, helpless before his masculine killer. This vision becomes reality soon after, as he lies pinned like a butterfly by Achilles' spear, begging for a decent burial (*Il.* 22.337ff.). Since this monologue sums up for us in many ways the character of Hector, his strengths and his failings, it is no accident that talking like a woman marks for him the impossibility of survival: he cannot sustain the dream of that other, feminine self, which seems to him the negation of all that is heroic. But the idea of being a woman—or acting like one—stays with Hector a little longer in the monologue. As he clings to it, his mind goes back to a time he did in fact talk like a wife: "And quickly he (Paris) came upon his brother Hector, as he was about to turn away from the spot where he was talking like a wife (*oarize*) to his wife" (*Il.* 6.514–16).[3]

The verb is used only in these two places in Homeric epic, though cognate nouns also appear in a few passages. Of these, two remain firmly within the world of women: *oar,* "wife" (*Il.* 9.327), and *oaristus* (*Il.* 14.216), the power of intimate, sexually-charged congress wafting from the girdle of Aphrodite; *oaristês,* "dear friend," is used by Odysseus in his disguise as Aethon, describing the friendship of "Odysseus" and Idomeneus (*Od.* 19.179). Here Odysseus is in fact talking *to* his wife, though she doesn't know it. In two other places, *oaristus* appears in contexts that extend the range of the root meaning in suggestive ways. At *Iliad* 13.291, the noun is limited by *promachôn,* "fighters in the forefront" and, at *Iliad* 17.228, it appears with *polemou,* "battle." The poet creates a brilliant and disturbing metaphor, comparing the chaos of battle, where men mingle with their enemies, to an intimate—often sexual—encounter.

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2 This essay began as a lecture given at Bucknell University on February 11, 1998. I am grateful to William Johnson and Janet Jones for inviting me to speak and to the audience at the talk, who gave me valuable suggestions for improving the essay.

3 The scholarship on Hector's exchange with Andromache is endless, as is the commentary on his monologue. Of particular interest for the approach I use here, see: Loraux 1995.75-86, Redfield 1994.158-59, Richardson 1993.120, Segal 1971, Van Nortwick 1992.

The common thread running through all these usages is that of boundaries breached, of intimacy that scrambles the orderly separation so integral to masculinity in Greek epic. For Hector, as for all males in the world of ancient heroic poetry, identity follows from separation. The masculine hero has two imperatives: move away from the nurturing embrace of the mother and come to terms with the hard wisdom embodied somehow in the father. Thetis loves Achilles and will do anything to please him: arrange for his fellow Greeks to die for dishonoring him and supply divinely-made armor so he can pursue his destructive and self-destructive vengeance against Hector. Not until the ultimate father, Zeus, co-opts her in the beginning of *Iliad* 24 does she let go of her son and allow him to learn from his suffering by letting go of the body of Hector. The agent for this final release is Priam, who explicitly aligns himself with Peleus. As Patroclus and Hector must die, so must he—this is the lesson that frees Achilles to move from vicarious participation in the world of the gods into his true mortal nature. The pattern is ubiquitous: to reach maturity, Telemachus must leave Ithaca and his mother to go in search of his father; Aeneas must leave Carthage and the snares of his notoriously unreliable mother and find his father in the underworld so as to become the new Roman hero; Oedipus shows us the horror of the hero's failure to separate: returning to and sleeping with his mother, killing his father, he lives a false life. Finding his true identity in the aftermath can only bring suffering and death.

The ancient paradigm for masculine identity remains firmly in place today. Though articulated through different metaphors—Freudian Oedipal urges, Jungian individuation—the imperatives persist: to become oneself, to realize one's identity, is to achieve distance and autonomy; masculinity is properly—in this view—concerned with rules, which protect boundaries; the feminine always blurs boundaries and so autonomy; to reach out to others is to be "selfless." Most importantly, for the ancient paradigm and for us, is the masculine metaphor of self-creation through acting outward into a world from which we feel separate, carving ourselves out from the stuff around us.

Contemporary arguments about the basis for this tenacious mode of experiencing life—nature, culture, somewhere in between—are embedded in post-industrial western cultures. I will not resolve them here, partly because the evidence is finally inconclusive and partly because my own story keeps superimposing itself over "the facts." As a teenager, I tried to distance myself from *both* my parents, moving away from my mother's alcoholism and what I perceived as my father's failures as a man. At age 21,

I married young and not wisely, hoping to escape from my mother. I went to graduate school in classics in part to prove that I was not my father and to find other models from whom I could learn to be a man. I would make a new self by working my will in the world.

Now both of my parents are dead, and I look back with wonder and chagrin at the price of my insistence on self-creation. Only in the few precious months before she died did I find a way back to my mother. My father and I never made a strong connection, I suspect in part because I did find substitutes for him: my prep school teacher, my dissertation adviser, my older colleague at Oberlin. I have been blessed to have these men in my life, and to them I owe much of whatever success I have had in growing up. But I am a middle-aged man now, moving beyond the reach of the forces that drove me away from those I might have loved better if I had known how. Now I am free to look back at what I have done and become from a different perspective, one that allows me to see that those connections from which I was running so purposefully have always had a bigger role in forming me than I was ready to admit. There is no better place to learn about this process than the story of Hector in the *Iliad.*

The marriage of Hector and Andromache carries a heavy symbolic load in the *Iliad*. Trojan civilization stands for all that is at risk when the forces of masculine self-assertion rage unchecked, and, at the center of that civilization, embodying its fragility and complexity, stand a man and a woman. And between them, their child. Book 6 of the *Iliad* takes us inside the city walls with Hector, to see what he must defend and what he will inevitably lose. In his meetings with Hecuba, Paris, Helen, and, finally, Andromache and Astyanax, he carries the world of battle with him, so that each encounter dramatizes both particular emotional dynamics—mother and son, sibling rivalries, husband and wife, father and son—and a larger interaction between the relentless masculine drive for status in a hierarchical, zero-sum warrior society and the feminine need for connection, blurring and so threatening the boundaries of masculine identity.

Hector tells his troops he is heading into the city. The shift in venue will be abrupt, and so Homer prepares the way with the battlefield encounter of Glaucus and Diomedes. Here the tide of death is stemmed for a brief time, as the two men find a connection in guest friendship, a sheltered space within the competitive world that lets them avoid fighting. The digression introduces a theme that will dominate the rest of Book 6: the fragility of human bonds and their vulnerability before masculine self-assertion. This motif has already surfaced in Agamemnon's earlier brutal speech to his

brother, condemning all Trojans, including women and unborn children, to death (*Il.* 6.55–60). Within the digression, attempted murder is motivated by male jealousy over a woman, resulting in the attempt by Proitus to have Bellerophon killed. But, finally, the secret deadly symbols fail to effect their design, and the episode ends, a generation later, with a precarious respite.

In the story of Glaucus and Diomedes, failed communication leads to the preservation of human bonds. Once inside Troy's walls, we see the reverse: all attempts to connect eventually fail, and those who should be closest are made strange to one another by a clash of two perspectives, one driven by the imperatives of the war culture, the other reflecting a need for attachment and intimacy. Hecuba finds her son covered with gore and offers him wine to renew his strength. He must decline: bloody hands cannot offer libations to Zeus. Hector is an alien here, still marked by the stains of heroic self-assertion, and so his mother cannot reach across the borders of his autonomy to nourish him. By urging him to him to drink wine, he fears, she would cut him off from his *menos,* "strength," and make him "forget his defensive prowess" (*Il.* 6.265). He sends her instead to propitiate Athena with sacrifices in the temple. Athena, the goddess linked so often with masculine prerogatives, turns away and will not listen to the Trojan women.

Hector proceeds yet further into the alluring feminine world, entering the bedchamber of Paris and Helen to fetch his brother to battle. Homer is careful to tell us that, as if for protection, Hector brings with him his spear, eleven cubits long and tipped in bronze. He rebukes Paris for hanging back and acknowledges that he does not understand his brother, calling him *daimonie*, "strange man." The word, though translations sometimes render it bland, is powerful, evoking the unbridgeable gulf between human and divine existence. To use it is to compare human behavior to the uncanny—and often frightening—actions of a *daimôn*, a supernatural being. Paris's reply, breezy and oblivious to his brother's pain, captures well, in turn, his inability to understand Hector. Helen, he says, has just now been urging him to re-enter the battle, and so he will catch up to his brother. It is Helen's hatred of her husband that prompts the suggestion to return to the battlefield. Their bitter relationship helps to define by contrast the love between Hector and Andromache, who will beg her husband to stay out of battle.

Before he can make his escape, Helen urges Hector to sit and rest, her manner verging on the seductive, flattering him at Paris's expense. He is immediately on guard, refusing her offer, invoking instead his relationship to his fellow warriors, who are missing his fighting strength. In ancient Greek literature, the offer of a seat and something to drink is usually part of

the attempt to console someone who grieves the death of someone dear to him or her. To sit and drink is to signal acceptance of the loss and a readiness to go on with life. Thetis is offered a seat and a drink by Zeus when he summons her to Olympus in Book 24 of the *Iliad*. She accepts both, showing her acceptance of the coming death of Achilles. Priam and Achilles console each other with the same tokens soon after (*Il.* 24.621–32). In the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (191–212), Demeter, disguised as a mortal nurse, is offered and eventually accepts consolation from the family of Celeus. Helen's gesture, which can be understood as combining with Hecuba's to form the complete consolation pattern, carries the same resonance: she would have Hector let go of his will to fight on in the face of his own certain death. Though he himself knows that Troy is doomed, he cannot give in to the alluring prospect of accepting his own mortality, the one thing masculine heroes find hardest to do.

Hector goes to his own home to look for Andromache. In the exchange that follows, the themes of alienation, self-destructive masculinity, and the tension, in men and in the texture of civilized life, between masculine and feminine come to fruition. Andromache is not home, having gone out to the tower to look at the battle, which she has heard is going badly for the Trojans. She has not, it is said twice, gone with the rest of the women to pray to Athena. By pointedly separating Andromache from the rest of the Trojan women, Homer foreshadows the terrible isolation she foresees in the event of Hector's death. Hector meets Andromache, along with a nurse carrying Astyanax, at the gates to the city, on the boundary between the world of battle and the protected inner space of the city.

Fixing on the essentials of the tragic masculine life, she invokes the theme of estrangement: "Strange man (*daimonie*), your own strength will destroy you" (*Il.* 6.407). Once again, those who ought to be most intimate are pulled apart by competing visions of human life. *Menos,* "strength," to which Hector clings to fuel his self-assertion, will make Andromache a widow and Astyanax an orphan. Imagining the bleak future takes Andromache back to her past when she was orphaned by another man's heroic drive, losing her mother and father to Achilles. Now Hector is father, mother, brother, and husband to her, and his death will make not one but two orphans. Instead of going back into the field, why not cluster his troops by the "fig tree," where the Greeks attacked once before (*Il.* 6.413–39)?

Amid the richness of these lines, we observe a central facet of Homer's portrait of Hector's wife: she seems to enter into her husband's

world, giving him strategic advice and already suffering the isolation that attends all masculine heroes. Standing on the boundary between war and civilization, life and death, masculine and feminine, she crosses over in her attempt to keep Hector close. He, in his turn, will move toward her, but first he stakes out familiar territory. He cares about everything she has said, and yet (*Il.* 6.441–46):

> I would be dreadfully
> ashamed before the Trojan men and the long-robed
> Trojan women,
> if like a coward I should shrink back from battle.
> Nor does my heart drive me to do so, since I have
> learned to excel
> at fighting among the front ranks of Trojans, guarding
> my father's glory and my own.

Shame is the common coin of masculine heroic culture, a deterrent from risking the vulnerability that comes of opening oneself up to another, of allowing autonomy to be compromised by intimacy. We begin to suspect that Hector's refusal to entertain his wife's suggestion—surely at least worth considering given the history of the war—is not based on military strategy. Rather, what is at stake here is his own need to understand himself in a certain way, to assert, over and over, his very existence by *standing out* from the group.

The tenacity of this perspective is clear from Hector's attempt to express his love to Andromache while under its spell. His imagination is dominated by the certainty of Troy's eventual fall: death or slavery is coming for them all; but the deaths of all his family, mother, father, and brothers, bother him less than the specter of Andromache enslaved. He imagines her at the loom, carrying water, under a "powerful necessity." The ultimate degradation, left unsaid, will be forced sex with her owner. Now we come to the nub (*Il.* 6.459–61):

> Someone sometime will see her shedding tears and say,
> "This was the wife of Hector, who used to be the best at
> fighting
> of all the horse-taming Trojans, when they fought
> around Ilion."

No one can doubt that Hector loves his wife, but he cannot sustain a vision of her loss that does not eventually circle back to his own horror at being seen as inadequate by others.

It is tempting to say of Hector's anguish that it is all about him, that Andromache is finally important to him because she expresses something about his power or lack of it. But that would be to miss the genuine struggle inside him—a subjectivity expressed objectively as is the case in many works of Greek literature—between different ways of seeing himself and those he loves. He ends his speech by echoing Andromache's earlier wish to "go under the earth" once he has died (*Il.* 6.410–11): "May the earth cover over my dead body before I hear your voice as you are dragged away" (*Il.* 6.464–65). He would be smothered (*kaluptoi)*, the ultimate threat to masculine autonomy (which Calypso, for example, embodies for Odysseus), rather than hear her crying out. But his aversion is driven by fear of the very thing he would choose by going under the earth, degradation of his masculine identity in the shame of Andromache's enslavement.

From this ambiguous position, Hector moves further into the world he shares with his wife, reaching out his hands to take Astyanax, the concrete symbol of his merging with his wife. Carrying within him the genes of both Hector and Andromache, Astyanax holds in solution what the gender imperatives driving his parents would separate. When he shrinks back in fear of Hector's helmet, we are invited by the poet to laugh, but the moment recalls Hector's earlier encounter with his mother: the warrior may not touch his son until, by taking off his helmet, he sheds the war.

Hector's prayer, though issuing from his tenderness and vulnerability to love, cannot escape the tension that marked his earlier imagination of the future (*Iliad* 6.476–81):

> Zeus and all you other gods, let this my son be,
> as I am, distinguished among the Trojans;
> let his force win success, let him rule over Troy in his strength.
> And may someone say of him sometime as he returns from battle,
> "This man is much better than his father."
> May he kill an enemy, and bringing home bloody arms
> delight the heart of his mother.

Hector hopes for the only kind of good life he can imagine for his son, one like his. From where we stand, the delight of Andromache is harder to

envision. It is too much to say that his parents fight over Astyanax, but their visions of his future conflict in ways that are predictable and poignant. When Hector hands his son back, Andromache laughs again, but this time through tears, her emotions mirroring the terrible strains that pull at this family. Her distress brings pity and an affectionate caress from Hector, but, finally, she remains to him a "strange woman" (*daimoniê)* (*Il.* 6.486). After reassuring her that no one dies before his fated time, he urges her to go home and attend to her wifely duties at the loom and as mistress of the maids, a denatured version of her advice to him about his duties as warrior. War, he says, is the work of men.

Hector picks up his helmet, the symbol of his estrangement from Andromache, and we feel the poet sealing his hero off again. His wife, meanwhile, goes home and begins the grieving for him. She will never see him alive again. But there is one more waystation for Hector in his carefully articulated progress into and out of the feminine world. Homer shifts our attention abruptly from Andromache's anguish to Paris, prancing to battle like a stallion, shining like the sun (*Il.* 6.503–14). The horse simile captures brilliantly Paris's shallow insouciance, almost brutal in the wake of the pain we have witnessed. Gleaming like sunshine, he mirrors the deadly radiance of Hector's helmet (cf. *Il.* 6.473, 513), deceptively beautiful. The two brothers meet as Hector turns from the spot "where he talked like a wife (*oarize)* to his wife" (*Il.* 6.516). Paris hails his brother with typically inappropriate breeziness: "Dear brother, I've held you up with my dallying, and have not come on time, as you urged me to" (*Il.* 6.518–19). We are not surprised at this point to hear Hector begin his reply with *daimonie.* He cannot understand his brother: no one doubts Paris's fighting strength, and yet he hangs back, unwilling to fight. It pains Hector to hear shameful things about Paris—again perhaps a whiff of Hector's self-regarding anxiety here: it's embarrassing to have a brother who won't fight, especially since he is the cause of so much pain to others. But no time for this, he says, back into battle (*Il.* 6.521–29). Hector's interlude in Troy ends as it began, in the failure to connect.

To summarize: Hector's encounters with others inside Troy are all played out around the boundaries of masculine and feminine as the Greeks understood them. His family becomes in this way a crucible for testing fundamental distinctions that articulate the context within which heroic action occurs. As he moves through the exchanges with Hecuba, Paris, Helen, and Andromache, Hector moves into and out of various roles: son, brother, brother-in-law, husband, father. In every case, he is finally unable to connect with the other person, and these failures evoke an elemental es-

trangement that prompts the word *daimonie(ê)*. This alienation implies more than simply a difference of opinion or belief. Rather, the two parties are working from different models for understanding the meaning of human life—the Hector who insists on being in the forefront of battle is not the Hector whom his wife imagines staying with her. Because the stakes are so high, there is deep pain in these scenes, much of it occasioned by the frustration of the lover to make contact with his or her beloved. In the presence of this pain, we may well be drawn to reflect on our own intimate relationships. But our reflections will take us further if we first think about another dimension of Homer's poetic aims in these lines, one that will deepen our understanding of the characters in the poem and of ourselves.

I have said that it is the habit of Greek poets to project outward, to objectify what we now understand as an inner, subjective dynamic. On a small scale, we see this in the conversations that heroes have with their own hearts, or *thumoi* in Greek, which represent what we now understand as turning over alternatives within our minds. A more significant example is the use in some ancient Mediterranean narratives of a second self or alter-ego figure, a character who carries aspects of the hero that the hero himself has lost track of or perhaps doesn't yet know. Enkidu plays this role for the Babylonian hero Gilgamesh, Patroclus for Achilles. In this dynamic, the relationship between the hero and his second self objectifies what is for us an interior, subjective experience. There are strengths in each way of seeing the dynamic: our modern metaphors, attuned to an interior experience, may offer what we imagine to be a more subtle and nuanced representation of human consciousness, but the ancient habit of exterior dramatization can clarify the different parts of the interaction.

Hector's struggles with his family can be seen in the same way: his journey into and out of Troy can—like the hero's trip to the underworld—be understood as a journey into himself, an exploration of the interior dynamics of his psyche, spirit, soul, whatever. The structure of Book 6 highlights the meeting of Hector and Andromache, but in fact the entire visit, as I have said, dramatizes tensions that we can give ourselves permission to understand as being inside Hector—and perhaps, by extension and in differing proportions, inside all men in the poem. (However intriguing and sometimes powerful women or goddesses may be in Homeric epic, they finally serve as foils to the dominant male focus of the poems. We can, of course, work to extrapolate a picture of women's inner lives from the same dynamic I have been describing here, but we move outside the arena of the poems' primary focus.) How, exactly, Homer might be asking, do the forces that we now call masculine and feminine work to articulate a male human experience?

To answer this question fully is way beyond our scope here. But we can see how such an answer might be framed by looking at the quadratic relationship between Hector, Andromache, Paris, and Helen as we find it in Book 6, and its coda in Hector's monologue. We might begin by saying that Paris could represent a corrupted version of the behavior that Andromache seems to be urging on Hector. That is, though he has the capacity to fight in the forefront, he has, when Hector finds him, chosen not to do so, staying instead not only inside the walls of Troy but inside his bedroom, the arena for his sexual encounters with Helen. Those encounters, in turn, represent the mingling intimacy, the crossing of boundaries that Hector finds threatening.[4]

So the desire to stay with his wife places Paris before us as one who has chosen differently than Hector will choose later on in the book. He has given himself over to the intimate venue that Hector avoids. By doing so, he has earned the contempt of his wife, who urges him to leave the city and enter battle, motivated by the desire to see him dead. All this, as I have said, presents a stark contrast to the relationship of Hector with Andromache, who loves and needs her husband, and wants him to stay closer to her so he will not die. Paris is soft, tainted by the blurred boundaries between himself and Helen, stripped of armor as Hector imagines himself to be in his monologue and so "womanly"; Hector is hard and bound, covered in armor, keeping Helen at bay with his spear. Paris is polishing his armor, making it shine as an aesthetic object, not as the deadly symbol and instrument of war represented by Hector's helmet. Helen's invitation to Hector asks him to give in to the part of himself mirrored back by Paris—they are, after all, brothers. Or—dare we go further?—does he see something in himself that *Helen* represents?

The same kinds of contrasts articulate his meeting with Andromache, as we have seen. But now the temptation to yield is much greater than in Paris's bedroom. There, he could bolster his resolve with the universal scorn of all Trojans for the irresponsible Paris and his dangerous wife. Here, he is met by the model of a good wife, loyal and dutiful, who asks him to live the life of a virtuous husband, caring for his family. There, he could turn away

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4 A qualification: the one scene we have that shows Paris and Helen heading for a sexual encounter is in Book 3 of the *Iliad*, and there Helen is to some extent coerced into sleeping with her husband—the desire to dominate that characterizes battle could be attached to Paris here (3.390-447). But we are looking at a particular set of contrasts set up by the visit of Hector to Troy in Book 6, not at the more rounded portrait of Paris that emerges from the entire poem or even the entire cycle of stories about the Trojan War. We are looking at how Paris offers a contrast to Hector within a specific set of circumstances.

from the source of suffering, shame, and death. Here, he finds the woman with whom he has created new life, a son who carries hope for the future and can be the extension of his own glory. There, he sees two people defined by their indifference to the lives of others; here, a woman who clings to him as the only family she has, who calls on him not only as her husband and the father of their child but as *her* father and mother. There, he was met by a man immune to the urgencies of battle: he will fight if the mood strikes him, but takes no responsibility for the outcome of the war he ultimately caused; here, a woman who can offer viable strategic advice.

We have already seen how the tension between the two versions of himself, one his own, driven by heroic masculine imperatives, the other Andromache's, tears at Hector as he tries to express his love for Andromache and Astyanax, how neither the dream for his son's future glory nor the nightmare of his wife's future enslavement can escape the pull of a perspective that finally precludes giving himself to those most precious to him. When he meets Paris on the way back into battle, nothing has been resolved, and estrangement from his own blood relatives is undiminished. In the course of these luminous scenes, we have seen Hector push against the boundaries of a masculine understanding of himself as separate, as defined by his detachment. We have, in turn, emerged from this set of interactions with a clearer and richer idea of the assumptions that underlie Hector's own understanding of the terms of his existence and identity. This picture emerges in part because he sees—and so we see—the outlines of alternate selves with alternate futures emerge from his encounters. Some of these selves frighten and disgust him, some pull at him painfully.

All of this pain surges up again in the monologue with which we began. Much has happened to Hector since he saw his wife. He has led his men across the wall around the Greek compound, set fire to their ships, killed Patroclus, and taken for himself the armor of Achilles. Along the way, Poulydamas has twice urged restraint, and both times Hector has ignored him, pushing forward in the rush of battle. Now, with Achilles bearing down on him and death close by, all that he has done and all that he is come into question. I have already quoted part of what he says to his *thumos* when considering the possibility of bargaining with Achilles. The speech begins, in fact, right where the visit in Book 6 leaves off, with the question of whether to fight from inside the walls (*Il.* 22.99–107):

> Alas, if I should enter the gates and walls,
> Poulydamas would the first to heap shame on me;
> he urged me to lead the Trojans toward the city

> on that deadly night when brilliant Achilles rose up.
> But I would not be persuaded, though it would have
> been far better.
> Now since I have destroyed the people through my rash
> acts,
> I feel shame before the Trojans and the long-robed
> Trojan women,
> for fear that someone worse than I will sometime say,
> "Hector destroyed the people, trusting in his own
> strength."

The echoes of his conversation with Andromache are obvious and, in one instance, verbatim. But the differences are also telling. Here it is a fellow warrior, not his wife, who urges him back toward the city. This, in turn, takes us back to his exchange with Helen. Then, declining her invitation to rest, he invokes his fellow Trojan warriors, who "long for me in my absence" (*Il.* 6.362). These words tend to flow by us in the midst of Hector's anxiety to escape his seductive sister-in-law, but now they prompt further reflection. I have described him as torn between an idea of himself as masculine warrior, defined by his separation from others, and his role within a family, where the boundaries are less certain. But can we see his fellow warriors as another kind of family in need of protection?

If so, the portrait of Hector's masculine identity is—no surprise—made more complex in the context of Book 22. We might reformulate things this way: the tension within Hector between self-assertion and self-definition, on the one hand, and responsibility to others, on the other, cannot be articulated cleanly by the contrast between the war outside the walls and the peaceful society within. Both parts of him can find expression on the battlefield. And likewise, can we observe in his resistance to Andromache's strategic advice some vestiges of the competitive juices that flow on the battlefield?

Returning to the lines I quoted at the beginning of this paper, we see that they have a richer import when read against the background of Book 6. Introducing the passage, I characterized Hector as "wistful" when he imagines the chance to speak to Achilles as do a boy and girl. One might well have objected then that Hector's words could be heard quite differently. If he were, say, in the persona of a warrior like Ajax, then shame, contempt and/or self-loathing might be more accurate: "See what a pathetic man I am, made weak by my own foolishness." But Hector is not Ajax, and the visit to Troy is designed to tell us so. To *oarizein*, after all, is to behave as Homer

characterized his entire exchange with Andromache. Once we have seen him struggle through the emotional narrows in Troy, we cannot understand him in the same way. The feminine part of Hector has been tied in our minds not to weakness and defeat but to a deeply-felt set of bonds that help to make him who he is.

We might further observe that the essence of Hector's identity is articulated not, as the masculine heroic paradigm would suggest, in isolation, with the hero carving out his existence in defiance of time and chance, but rather in the interaction with other models of selfhood: Paris, Helen, Andromache, and so forth. Hector comes into being for us, as does Achilles, *relationally,* and gender is a primary factor in both creations: Patroclus, as I have argued elsewhere, complements Achilles' overbearing masculinity with a feminine presence. But Hector is unique in the *Iliad* in that his character is determined so thoroughly by his interactions with a woman.

Here is where my own history again rises insistently before me. I did not see Hector or Achilles in this way when I first began teaching undergraduates 25 years ago, in part because I did not want to see myself thus. My own identity, as I understood it, was to be formed by my acting out into the world, creating myself through action. Separation, not connection, was central to my idea of who I wanted to be and become. But this perspective caused problems for me, as for Hector, in my relations with others. I have always in fact been, I now recognize, a man who feels most comfortable in a network of relationships—that's just the kind of person I am. I was born that way. This aspect of my character did not, of course, square with the masculine drive to separate. So, in my early adult years, I often felt alarmed—perhaps even ashamed—that when faced with the choice between abstract principle and the demands of relationships, my first impulse was to honor connection. This seemed, well, *soft* to me. The tension in me, between my relational urges and my drive to escape the ties of family that frightened me, cast a shadow over my first marriage, which lasted until I was 38. Trying to work out a marital partnership in the midst of my struggle, I was always ambivalent about letting myself share a life. Intimacy often frightened me, as it does Hector. I could not accept that I could become a man (indeed that I was becoming a man) formed by my relations with my wife and others.

Not surprisingly, my first marriage collapsed in the onset of midlife. In the next dozen years, I have been slowly learning to understand myself and my place in the larger scheme of things in a different way. I have been for the last ten years part of a wonderfully fruitful marital partnership,

within which I have been able to grow up. In a way that is typical for males of my age and place, I have become more comfortable with the feminine parts of myself, and can *oarizein* with pleasure and profit. At the same time, I now understand that I have always seen the Classics Department at Oberlin as a haven within which I could feel safe and learn how to be a man. Like Hector, I had another family, made up of men. And countless students too—women and men—have made with me a rich set of connections out of which they and I have been formed.

Quantum physics tells us that we are all part of a continuum, ripples in the space-time fabric. The cosmos, it seems, is not made up of discrete entities passing each other in a void. As I look back at my life, this way of explaining the universe seems compelling. I now can see my self-assertion not as heroic sallies into the world but as expressions of an interconnected field of human energy out of which I was formed and reformed. Like Hector, I resisted this vision while searching for an illusory confirmation of my separate existence. I am grateful to have outlived this version of myself and to be able to take my place in the dance of the cosmos.

Happy as I am, I sometimes wish I could have skipped all that earlier pain that I caused myself and others who loved me. But I also understand that we can only know important things about ourselves when we are ready, emotionally and spiritually, to know them. The time has come when I am ready to know myself anew, and I am eager to begin. Hector's vision of peace can only be, for him, a fleeting dream. But I can look into it and see myself. I can see that part of the sweetness of the world he imagines is, for him and for me, in the freedom to shed the armor of heroism, to loll around under that oak tree and share a life with someone.

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