

## COMMENTATIONES AD LITTERAS GRAECAS SPECTANTES

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### SOCIAL MEMORY AND ITS LITERARY FORMS IN GREEK EPIC AND TRAGEDY

ABSTRACT. Schade Gerson, Social memory and its literary forms in Greek epic and tragedy.

Several Homeric departure-scenes, depicting a son leaving his father, contain as their central theme the idea of becoming such a hero as one's father was. In light of the new concept 'social memory' it is no wonder that the central message of the heroic code, 'always try to excel', is part of the conversation during the departure-scenes, for the simple reason that this phrase and those connected with it define the social memory of the heroic society, the 'heroic code'. Reminiscences of one's father and his words mean much to heroes, structure their lives, provide a frame, and help them to cope with the current situation.

Keywords: Social memory, heroic code, departure-scene, 'always try to excel'.

It is still new to the study of classical Greek and Latin literature to speak about social memory. Although the concept has been discussed for roughly forty years now, somehow it has not made its way yet into the academic discourse of Classics. Many a classical scholar shies away from modern terms in general and may think of them as out of his or her line. Even using a common term like discourse, as I did in the preceding sentence, is seen by some as too modernist an approach.<sup>1</sup> But why not have a try at examining a new idea? How much, if anything, might be gained by applying the concept of social memory to classical literature? Is it just a new and fashionable label, attached to already satisfactorily explained and fully described items? Or is there something hidden, that

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once brought to light would shine? Before we come to that – what does the term actually mean?

Social memory is an abstract idea and it goes without saying that it does not exist in any physical sense. There is no institution we could turn to if we wanted to know something about it, and there was none in antiquity either. Social memory is, as ‘social’ indicates, always something concerning a group of people and their identity. It turns out that the most common means to establish social memory is the telling of stories, the performance of narrative among friends.<sup>2</sup> That is the way by which a group determines what is ‘memorable’ and what has to be forgotten, namely not to be mentioned any longer. *How* things or persons or events will be remembered, is defined too. It does not matter whether the stories are true or not, whether social memory works by keeping archives or making myths. What matters is that the term ‘memory’ describes not an individual act of quiet recollection or private reminiscence, but something public.

This matter settled, you may ask what has that to do with literature. Well, because every work of fiction illuminates the society within which it is produced, one might say that literary texts inform about social memory. In general, literary texts make sense in terms of the attitudes of the society they portray, and by depicting the attitudes of that society literature preserves the background of meaning against which a mental process is seen. Eventually, literature itself might be regarded as one kind of memory of a society.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>At first sight, the concept seems to have a lot to do with collective remembrance, i.e. the fact that many people remember the same events of their lifetime, as e.g. going to school together or what they did e.g. during the evening when the Berlin wall came down. But collective remembrance is not at all mentally constructed. It just happened that we went to school together, because our parents are neighbours, and as we do watch television every evening, we saw how the Berlin wall came down. No effort was needed to share such a collective remembrance. A closer look reveals that both concepts even exclude each other mutually. It may appear paradoxical, but the more people remember identical items and share similar memories, the more social memory lessens in the same proportion, as if it were no longer necessary to sustain it. Only when the social memory of a group seems somehow disturbed or disrupted, collective remembrance is wished for and becomes ever more needed in order to re-establish the social memory of that group. As long as there are enough people together who share a similar upbringing, a common set of values, and who live together in their world, as if it were the only one to exist, no need is felt to construct a social memory. The more people are of homogeneous origin, the less they speak about their social memory. Only the real or imaginary explosion of a world or its anticipated annihilation, its dreaded destruction by strange events and extraordinary gestures provoke the return of its temporarily forgotten, pent-up, and even betrayed social memory. It is in a moment of crisis that people start to choose from the immense reservoir of half-conscious, half-mythic collective remembrance those elements with which they construct their social memory. Then, by remembering the past, a solution is found regarded as useful to the present. Never having a sense in itself, the past serves as an instrument by which one could get hold of ‘now’. This comes about by telling stories, whether true or not, which provide a narrative frame. Without these stories, social memory does not work.

<sup>3</sup>Literature constitutes and transmits social memory because the protagonists of literary texts remember themselves and remind each other of something they share, which otherwise would

Some will now concede, ‘fine, well said’, but still claim ‘that does concern only modern literature, doesn’t it?’ They will continue to ask why these considerations should be important when we discuss ancient Greek literature. Given the historic moment of ancient Greek literature, however, i.e. the transition from oral composition to written texts, the answer would point out that a public performance-literature such as the Greek literature of the archaic period is immensely important for a society’s social memory. Such a literature carries alone the weight of constituting and transmitting the social memory of their audiences.<sup>4</sup> In modern times there are newspapers, radio, television, now internet, mobile phones, facebook accounts, and we communicate via twitter. We have access, if we want it, to a huge amount of texts, which we can read individually at any moment. But archaic Greek societies such as the heroic one as shown by Homer did not communicate in this way. They badly needed publicly performed narratives in order to construct their identity.

That the poet of the *Iliad* was fully aware of our question-and-answer-game is shown by a well-known scene, in which Homer depicts the heroic protagonists themselves as calling to mind their commonly shared social memory. It is they who perform texts which mirror themselves and refer to their heroic status when Achilles sings of the glorious deeds of men, the glories of heroes – the kléa andrôn – to his friend Patroklos (*Iliad* 9.185–191):<sup>5</sup>

Μυρμιδόνων δ' ἐπί τε κλισίας καὶ νῆας ἰκέσθην,	185
τὸν δ' εὖρον φρένα τερπόμενον φόρμιγγι λιγείῃ	
καλῇ δαιδαλέῃ, ἐπὶ δ' ἀργύρεον ζυγὸν ἦεν,	
τὴν ἄρετ' ἐξ ἐνάρων πόλιν Ἡετίωνος ὀλέσσας:	
τῆ ὅ γε θυμὸν ἔτερπεν, ἀεῖδε δ' ἄρα κλέα ἀνδρῶν.	
Πάτροκλος δέ οἱ οἶος ἐναντίος ἦστο σιωπῆ,	190
δέγμενος Αἰακίδην ὅποτε λήξειεν ἀείδων.	

get lost if it were not retold and thus remembered. – Cf. J. Gould, *Ancient Poetry and Modern Readers, Inaugural Lecture*, Bristol 1969, p. 26, reprinted in J.G., *Myth, Ritual, and Exchange, Essays in Greek Literature and Culture*, Oxford 2001, p. 19: “[...] literature is the medium by which the cultural and moral tradition of any society is transmitted. It is the memory of society, and a society without a memory is a society without experience, with nothing known and everything to learn. Moreover literature is language put to considered use: its continued existence is the barrier between us and the degeneration of language to the level of mindless cliché and all too mindful leverage upon the emotions [...]. Literature, to quote Ezra Pound, ‘has to do with maintaining the cleanliness of the very tools, the health of the very matter of thought itself’.”

<sup>4</sup>Sappho and Alcaeus e.g. remind their groups – the thiasos and the hetairia respectively – of commonly shared memories. Nowadays, the process of establishing a social memory is organized in a different way, for in our days people are used to read as individuals for their own purpose and interest. The closest we can get is (probably) when we go to the theatre and see contemporary plays performed.

<sup>5</sup>The translation of Homer’s *Iliad* follows the version of E.V. Rieu’s, which appeared for the first time in 1950.

When they came to the Myrmidons' huts and ships, they found him enjoying music. He was singing of famous men and accompanying himself on a tuneful lyre, a beautifully ornamented instrument with a silver crossbar, which he had chosen from the spoils when he destroyed Eëtion's city. He was alone but for Patroclus, who was sitting opposite with his eyes on Achilles, quietly waiting for him to stop singing.

By performing a song about glorious heroic deeds, Achilles evokes the social memory of the group to which he belongs. We are witness to a scene in which Achilles sings of figures like himself. Those familiar with the concept of social memory would expect exactly that of Achilles, namely sitting in front of his beloved companion and praising the acts of heroes, because the heroic code had to be preserved. There was no better means than a hero's telling of heroic deeds, wasn't there? A performance of literature in an oral culture offers an ideal occasion to do exactly that. In our case, the hero *par excellence* is even the performer. Hardly anything else than the central figure of the *Iliad* would have been more impressive and convincing.

Those who find Achilles entertaining his friend Patroklos are the envoys of Agamemnon, who came to ask Achilles to return to the fight against the Trojans. In their following speeches they remind each other of shared values and hark back to some earlier point in their lives. This is a leitmotiv of the heroic-epic narrative, and the famous scene shows how the social memory of the heroes' society is embedded in and expressed by a literary text.<sup>6</sup>

The first envoy, who speaks, is Odysseus who, after having offered Agamemnon's gifts to Achilles, reminds Achilles of the words of Peleus, Achilles' father. When Achilles left his home in Phthia in order to join Agamemnon, Peleus of course told him to fight against the Trojans, but gave some additional instructions too. As if he had known what was to come, namely that his son would be unable to control his emotional life, Peleus advised him directly (*Iliad* 9.252–259):

ὦ πέπον ἦ μὲν σοί γε πατήρ ἐπετέλλετο Πηλεὺς  
 ἦματι τῷ ὅτε σ' ἐκ Φθίης Ἀγαμέμνονι πέμπε:  
 τέκνον ἐμὸν κάρτος μὲν Ἀθηναίη τε καὶ Ἥρη  
 δώσουσ' αἶ κ' ἐθέλωσι, σὺ δὲ μεγαλήτορα θυμὸν      255  
ἴσχειν ἐν στήθεσσι: φιλοφροσύνη γὰρ ἀμείνων:  
 ληγέμεναι δ' ἔριδος κακομηχάνου, ὄφρα σε μᾶλλον  
 τίωσ' Ἀργείων ἡμὲν νέοι ἠδὲ γέροντες.  
 ὡς ἐπέτελλ' ὁ γέρων, σὺ δὲ λήθεται.

'My good friend, when your father Peleus sent you from Phthia to join Agamemnon, did he not admonish you in these words: "My son, Athene and Here,

<sup>6</sup>The audience somehow participates in this set of values, for otherwise the listeners would not have been able to understand what the poet wanted to remind them of.

if they wish you well, are going to make you strong. What you must do is to keep a check on that proud spirit of yours, you must restrain your proud soul; for a kind heart is a better thing than pride. Quarrels are deadly. Be reconciled at once; and all the Argives young and old will look up to you the more”? Those were the old man’s precepts – which you have forgotten.’

By remembering his father’s words, Odysseus entreats Achilles to yield to his requests and he wants him to give in upon that point. Nothing, however, would bring Achilles to restrain his proud soul or to hold back his anger; he remains uncompromising. But if he had wanted to, it might have been feasible, and he is clearly addressed by Odysseus as the one capable of restraining himself. This setting presupposes (at first) internalized values, as in Achilles’ case being gentle-minded, of which (then) a father can remind his son so that he (finally) could act accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

Phoinix, who speaks next, will try again and much harder. He is particularly well chosen for the purpose of reminding a son of his father’s words, because he is the foster father of Achilles, whom he reminds of his childhood. Phoinix himself is in an emotional turmoil when he starts his long speech (434–605), because Achilles had categorically refused any of Odysseus’ gifts and announced that he was leaving Troy. Bursting into tears, Phoinix remembers their common departure. The day Achilles left his home in order to join Agamemnon, he was accompanied by Phoinix who received instructions from Achilles’ father Peleus. He remembers not only Achilles as unskilled in war and debate (*Iliad* 9.440sq.) but also his father’s wish that Phoinix would teach him all these things, “to be both a speaker of words and a doer of deeds” (443).

Achilles was not much inclined to listen to an old man, sobbing and shedding tears (433), even if he happens to be his foster father Phoinix.<sup>8</sup> But Phoinix had only begun; he is familiar with Achilles’ stubbornness and not the least deterred by it. In a next step, Phoinix tells a story of his own youth, which he compares

<sup>7</sup>We can only guess why Homer chose the departure scene for transmitting central issues of the heroic code. One reasonable answer might be that scenes of that kind are fraught with strong emotions. A son leaving for war cannot be sure to see his father again, not only because he may die in battle, but also, even if he safely returns home, his father might well be dead in the meantime. It is an impressive moment, which leaves a trace in the memory and which is likely to be remembered. Citing Peleus, tricky Odysseus wants to cash in on a brave son’s emotions. But his pleas are of no avail.

<sup>8</sup>Not at this stage of the story. Later on, however, Achilles is very much impressed by Hector’s father shedding tears; he cries himself, when Priamos and he remember both the lives of father and son respectively (*Iliad* 24.507–512); cf. J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, Oxford 1980, pp. 99sq. & 123–127. Remembering Patroklos, Achilles suffers much too (*Iliad* 23.59–109), and when he finally burns the corpse of his friend, Achilles is compared to a father lamenting his dead son (*Iliad* 23.222–225): “As a father weeps when he is burning the bones of a son who has died on his wedding-day and left his stricken parents in despair, Achilles wept as he burned his comrade’s bones, moving round the pyre on leaden feet with many a deep groan.”



emotions, Achilles now has to stop his arrogant behaviour. It does not make sense to behave as Achilles does because even the gods finally give in, who are much mightier than heroes can be. Achilles, however, does not show any sign of relenting or softening. At that point, he is so dour that he does not even grace Phoinix with a reply.

Looking for an ever stronger argument, Phoinix now reminds Achilles of a mythological paradigm. After the departure scene, the reminiscence of his own youth and then of the heroic childhood of wine-spitting Achilles, Phoinix tells Achilles the story of Meleager. Meleager is depicted in a situation quite similar to that which Achilles is now confronted with. He too felt angered, refused to fight, eventually returned. But he resumed fighting too late and Achilles is warned not to follow his example. Instead of indulging in sullen ill-humour, Achilles should immediately accept Agamemnon's gifts and return to battle (527–603).

One would think that telling a story about a hero of the older generation should do the job, but Phoinix again fails to convince Achilles (and this was his fourth try). Although Phoinix reminded Achilles of many things, of his father's wish, his foster father's youth, of his own upbringing and finally of another hero's shortcomings, his words had no effect and Achilles did not pay attention to them. He seems like a deaf man, as if he would no longer take care of the heroic code, as if he would not even listen to it. The social memory, however, still exists, otherwise the speeches of Odysseus and Phoinix would have made no sense at all and both would appear ridiculous to the audience, which they do not. Even we today understand them, but they did not connect with Achilles.

Ajax, the third speaker, also reminds Achilles of the heroic values. But Ajax does not remind Achilles of his father or father-like figures. Ajax is rather concerned with himself and the other two envoys. They behave right, and not wrong as Achilles does. When they arrived at his camp, Achilles addressed them as the dearest of the Achaeans even in his wrath, as he had put it at the beginning of the ninth book (*Iliad* 9.197 'to me, who is angry, you are most welcome'). The envoys appreciate this status, as Ajax says, and his only wish is that Achilles would again join their community. He cannot understand why Achilles is no longer respecting the rules which guide the heroes. Achilles ought to return and should abandon his grotesque anger, by which he endangers the whole Greek army and jeopardizes the victory over the Trojans. To Ajax, it does not make sense that Achilles hosts them and refuses at the same time the gifts of Agamemnon. Achilles appears to Ajax as showing no respect or deference, he seems discourteous even (a behaviour not to be admitted among persons of equal status).<sup>9</sup> Thus

<sup>9</sup>Ajax, who admonishes Achilles to respect the rules of hospitality and who suffers so much from his own character in Sophocles' play, uses the imperative *aídessai* (640). The chorus of the Sophoclean *Ajax*, addressed by him as the only ones who still abide by the rule of loyalty, i.e. respect the right law (350), is confident that Ajax can feel some shame, at least when he sees the chorus (344).

Achilles becomes himself unworthy of respect and appears contemptible by his own despicable behaviour. A vicious circle, indeed (*Iliad* 9.636–642):

... σοὶ δ' ἄληκτόν τε κακόν τε  
 θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι θεοὶ θέσαν εἵνεκα κόουρη  
 οἷης: νῦν δέ τοι ἑπτὰ παρίσχομεν ἕξοχ' ἀρίστας,  
 ἀλλὰ τε πόλλ' ἐπὶ τῆσι: σὺ δ' ἴλαον ἔνθεο θυμὸν,  
 αἰδεσσαι δὲ μέλαθρον: ὑπωρόφιοι δέ τοι εἶμεν 640  
 πληθύος ἐκ Δαναῶν, μέμαμεν δέ τοι ἕξοχον ἄλλων  
 κῆδιστοὶ τ' ἔμεναι καὶ φίλτατοι ὅσοι Ἀχαιοί.

‘But the gods have made your mind so implacably furious over a girl, a single girl. And here are we, offering you seven of the very best, and a great deal more into the bargain. Be a little more forbearing. And remember your obligations as our host. We are under your roof; we were picked from the whole Danaan army; and we wish for nothing better than to remain your closest and your dearest friends of all the Achaeans that there are.’

Ajax’ clever argument that the gods had put Achilles in his actual state, gives Achilles a chance to respond. He is not at all imagined as powerless, instead of which Ajax regards him as capable of taking a decision which would change his situation. In the same way Odysseus perceived Achilles as the master of his own will, which is not at all predicted or dominated by divine power. Nothing else is meant by “be a little more forbearing”, i.e. become mild, lessen your anger, and nothing else was meant by “restrain your proud soul, keep a check on your proud spirit.” Ajax, however, is appealing in vain to Achilles (as Odysseus did earlier). The peer-group pressure is of no use. Although Achilles considers Ajax as a congenial character, it does not occur to him to follow the advice of his heroic friends. If he were to, he would excuse Agamemnon’s behaviour, as he puts it himself (*Iliad* 9.645–648):

πάντ' ἂν μοι κατὰ θυμὸν εἰσαο μυθήσασθαι: 645  
 ἀλλὰ μοι οἰδάνεται κρᾶδίη χόλω ὅππότε κείνων  
 μνήσομαι ὡς μ' ἀσύφηλον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν  
 Ἀτρεΐδης ὡς εἴ τιν' ἀτίμητον μετανάστην.

‘There is much in what you say. But my blood boils when I think of what happened, and the vile way in which Agamemnon treated me in public, like some disreputable outcast.’

In Achilles’s view, Agamemnon had reduced him to a despicably looking tramp. Doing so, Agamemnon did not act according to the heroic code, for heroes have to be treated differently from ordinary people. Heroes are heroes, and Agamemnon is apparently unaware of some rules he is obliged to pay attention to. Agamemnon’s oblivion, his lacking social memory, is of great importance



in the present situation. The dilemma is apparent: Why should one hero (in our case Achilles) be mindful of the heroic code and stick to his rules, when at the same time another hero (in our case Agamemnon) apparently could not care less about it? Achilles comes close to giving in, simply because he likes Ajax whom he regards as a congenial character, a sympathetic mind. But the hatred between Achilles and Agamemnon is too great. No bridge stretches over the gulf which divides them. Achilles, against whom nothing can be done, continues to resist.<sup>10</sup>

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After this opening, I shall explain the importance of the departure-scene not only in Homer, but also in Sophocles and Virgil in three consecutive steps.

First step: Similar Homeric departure-scenes inform us about its context and general mood. Hector leaving his son (and wife) is of particular interest, not only because it shows that the heroic code is identical on both sides of the front but also because the scene had been remodelled by Sophocles. It turns out that the central theme of all these scenes is the idea of becoming such a hero as one's father was which means imitating his bravery as well as following his advice, in particular to act judiciously.

Second step: Although the Sophoclean *Ajax* is clearly dependent on the Homeric model (as will be shown), the relationship between father and son has drastically changed. Sophocles' Ajax takes leave of his son not because he wants to return to the glorious battle against the enemies (as Hector did), but with the clear intention to commit suicide. Ajax eventually kills himself and Sophocles seemingly perverts the Homeric model, or at least he ironically undercuts a well-known motif.

Third step: Translating the play, the Roman tragedian Accius made a Roman audience familiar with the scene. Whether Virgil saw a performance of the trag-

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<sup>10</sup>His unrepenting wrath makes him appear so awkward (so *améchanos* in the Greek text) that Peleus cannot have been his father. At least, these are the words of Achilles' best friend Patroklos, when he implores Achilles to let him fight. At the beginning of the sixteenth book of the *Iliad* Patroklos uses strong words (*Iliad* 16.33sq.): "Pitiless that thou art, the knight Peleus was not then thy father, nor Thetis thy mother, but the grey sea bare thee, and the sheer cliffs, so untoward is thy spirit." To Patroklos, Achilles appears difficult to manage, nearly intractable, stubborn, perverse even, and so irrational that he cannot be the son of his father. Achilles replies to Patroklos as we would expect him to do, and as he already did when answering Ajax. By taking away what belonged to him, Agamemnon treated him "like some disreputable outcast." At the beginning of the sixteenth book when the Achilles-story continues, the poet of the *Iliad* simply repeats the famous line from the ninth book, where Achilles spoke to Ajax (9.648 = 16.59 Achilles to Patroklos). – In the Sophoclean *Ajax*, it is Ajax who is called awkward or unmanageable (*dustrápelos* 913), harsh-tempered (*omóthymon* 885), and stubborn-hearted (*stereóphron* 926); he himself fears, and does not want to appear, a coward (*mè ásplagkhnos* 472).

edy is not known. But Virgil was not only fond of Greek tragedy,<sup>11</sup> but also read his epic predecessors very carefully. At the end of his *Aeneid*, Virgil ambiguously imitates both the epic and the tragic model of a scene where a thoughtfully admonishing father bids farewell to his naively obeying son. But now the scene has a double meaning. The theme of ‘become such a hero as your father’ is no longer simply a topic of heroic grandeur well known from Homer, but also of tragic failure first brought on stage by Sophocles. We see two treatments of one motif at the same time, two layers attached to one text.

#### 1<sup>ST</sup> STEP:

The departure scene mentioned by Odysseus, where Peleus advised his son to soften his anger, is reported again when Nestor reminds Achilles’ friend Patroklos of the same scene (11.766, in Nestor’s speech 656–803). Both Patroklos and Achilles were leaving Phthia simultaneously and both their fathers, Menoitios and Peleus, were present. In Nestor’s longer report we hear more about the context, where Peleus’ words were spoken. In fact, the principal theme of the heroic code comes to light.

In the eleventh book, Patroklos is sent to Nestor by Achilles. The situation on the Greek side had become really dangerous. Agamemnon, Diomedes,<sup>12</sup> and Odysseus are wounded, only Ajax carries on fighting. Nestor now beseeches Patroklos to exert influence on Achilles and reminds him of Peleus instructing his departing son ‘always to excel’ (11.784). It goes without saying that the same

<sup>11</sup>The tragic slant of some phrases in the *Aeneid* might be the reason why M. Valerius Martialis twice called his author *cothurnatus*, i.e. stalking about with heroic cothurn, wearing metaphorically the same thick-soled boot as tragic actors in Athens did in reality: *Epigram* 5.5.8 *grande cothurnati ... Maronis opus*, and 7.63.5 *sacra ... cothurnati Maronis*. The rare adjective is (perhaps ironically) used by Ovid to qualify the style of Lycophron’s *Alexandra* (*Ibis* 529 *cothurnatum ... Lycophrona*).

<sup>12</sup>Diomedes represents in one respect the opposite of Achilles – although he is openly insulted as a coward and a milksop by Agamemnon (*Iliad* 4.370–400), he does not retreat from battle. His reaction is moderate, he remains in the heroic peer-group, but he is very much aware that Agamemnon treated him unjustly and even reminds Agamemnon of his exaggerated expressions (*Iliad* 9.34–36). What makes the anti-Achillean posture of Diomedes so remarkable is their close connection to the paternal model. Rebuking Diomedes, Agamemnon compares him depreciatively to his father Tydeus, who was in Agamemnon’s view much braver than his son. Athena repeats this unfavourable comparison (*Iliad* 5.800–813) when she spurs Diomedes (wounded now) into action. Earlier in the same book of the *Iliad*, Tlepolemos challenges Sarpedon when he reproaches him for not living up to his father (*Iliad* 5.635–637); shortly after doing so, he gets killed by Sarpedon (659). – It seems obvious that a human being’s most deeply internalized moral standards are likely to be based on precisely this source of reference, i.e. the paternal model; cf. J. Griffin, *Homer on life and death*, Oxford 1980, p. 96, and D.F. Cairns, *Aidōs, The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*, Oxford 1993, pp. 231<sup>49</sup>, 259, 262.

applies to Patroklos. But his father Menoitios wanted him also to be a good counsellor to Achilles (11.786–789). His advice would be welcome as that of a comrade, a *hetairos*, who shares the same ethos, the same characteristic spirit, as Achilles does (*Iliad* 11.783–793):<sup>13</sup>

Πηλεὺς μὲν ὦ παιδὶ γέρων ἐπέτελλ' Ἀχιλῆϊ  
 αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπέρροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων:  
 σοὶ δ' αὖθ' ὦδ' ἐπέτελλε Μενόϊτιος Ἄκτορος υἱός: 785  
 τέκνον ἔμὸν γενεῆ μὲν ὑπέρτερός ἐστιν Ἀχιλλεύς,  
 πρεσβύτερος δὲ σύ ἐσσι: βίη δ' ὅ γε πολλὸν ἀμείνων.  
 ἀλλ' εὖ οἱ φάσθαι πυκινὸν ἔπος ἢ δ' ὑποθέσθαι  
 καὶ οἱ σημαίνειν: ὃ δὲ πείσεται εἰς ἀγαθὸν περ.  
 ὦς ἐπέτελλ' ὃ γέρων, σὺ δὲ λήθεαι: ἀλλ' ἔτι καὶ νῦν 790  
 ταῦτ' εἴποις Ἀχιλῆϊ δαΐφροναί κε πίθηται.  
 τίς δ' οἷδ' εἴ κέν οἱ σὺν δαίμονι θυμὸν ὀρίναις  
 παρειπών; ἀγαθὴ δὲ παραίφασίς ἐστιν ἑταίρου.

‘While the old man Peleus exhorted his boy Achilles always to strive for the foremost place and outdo his peers, Menoitios son of Actor was giving you his own advice. I remember his words: “My son,” he said, “Achilles is of nobler birth than you, and he is also by far the stronger man. But you are older than he is. It is for you to give him sound advice, to set him an example and to take the lead, which he will follow to his own advantage.” Those were your father’s precepts – which you have forgotten. But even so it is not too late for you to talk in this strain to Achilles. He might well have sense enough to listen. Who knows? A friend’s advice is often most effective, and with a little luck you may yet coax him into action.’

This exhortation ‘always to try one’s best’ forms a central part of the heroes’ social memory, remembered and brought to mind in a moment of crucial importance, when a son leaves his father for battle. If our argument is right, we should encounter the same spirit on the Trojan side, too. The Trojan heroic community should experience the same scenes of fathers bidding farewell to their sons and admonishing them to be always the bravest. In fact, they did.

For the first time we hear of it when Glaukos, the Trojan, meets Diomedes, the Greek. During their polite conversation in the middle of the battle-field, Glaukos reports his father’s words to Diomedes, spoken when he departed from him. His father Hippolochos used the same expression as Peleus to Achilles, and the same line occurs (11.784 = 6.208), namely that the son ‘be ever the boldest in fight, and pre-eminent over others’. In one breath a further specification is given, namely not to put to shame the ancestors, the generation of one’s fathers. We

<sup>13</sup>If Achilles had kept his father’s advice the life-threatening situation would not have come up. – On the Homeric expressions of the relationship between Patroklos and Achilles cf. D. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 37–42.

may reasonably infer that Peleus also said something similar about not putting to shame their own ancestors (*Iliad* 6.206–211):

Ἴππόλοχος δέ μ' ἔτικτε, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ φημι γενέσθαι:  
πέμπε δέ μ' ἐς Τροίην, καὶ μοι μάλα πόλλ' ἐπέτελλεν  
αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπέροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων,  
μηδὲ γένος πατέρων αἰσχυνέμεν, οἳ μέγ' ἄριστοι  
ἐν τ' Ἐφύρῃ ἐγένοντο καὶ ἐν Λυκίῃ εὐρείῃ. 210  
ταύτης τοι γενεῆς τε καὶ αἵματος εὐχομαι εἶναι.

'I am the son of Hippolochus, he sent me to Troy; and he used often to say to me, "Always excel. Strive to be best. Never disgrace your forefathers, who were the best men in Ephyre and Lycia." Such is my pedigree; that is the blood I claim as mine.'

At the same time, when Glaukos and Diomedes meet on the battlefield, Hector takes leave from his wife and his little son in the Trojan palace. Hector speaks of a lesson he had learnt, i.e. acting always in a brave manner so that nobody feels ashamed nor put to shame by him. His words sound like a very close variation of the theme evoked by Glaukos in the preceding scene of the same book. At the beginning of his speech, Hector talks about his aim to preserve the honour and the glory both of his father and of himself. The present-day situation is seen in the light of the past (*Iliad* 6.441–446):

... ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἰνῶς  
αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάδας ἔλκεσιπέπλους,  
αἱ κε κακὸς ὡς νόσφιν ἀλυσκάζω πολέμοιο:  
οὐδέ με θυμὸς ἄνωγεν, ἐπεὶ μάθον ἔμμεναι ἐσθλὸς  
αἰεὶ καὶ πρῶτοισι μετὰ Τρώεσσι μάχεσθαι 445  
ἀρνύμενος πατρός τε μέγα κλέος ἦδ' ἐμὸν αὐτοῦ.

'But if I hid myself like a coward and refused to fight, I could never face the Trojans and the Trojan ladies in their trailing gowns. Besides, it would go against the grain, for I have trained myself always, like a good soldier, to take my place in the front line and win glory for my father and myself.'

During this enormously impressive scene, Hector's son Astyanax, held by his mother Andromache, shies away from the helmet of his father. Taking him into his arms, Hector speaks of his greatest luck. Expressing his wish that one day Astyanax will be thought of as being even braver than his father was (6.479), Hector refers to the continuity of the heroic code and anticipates the positive reactions to it.<sup>14</sup> Now the actual situation is seen from a future point of view (*Iliad* 6.476–481):

<sup>14</sup> Apart from that, we may note that Hector is equally concerned with 'what other people might say' as Phoinix was, when he spoke about his juvenile anger, directed against his own father.

Ζεῦ ἄλλοι τε θεοὶ δότε δὴ καὶ τόνδε γενέσθαι  
 παῖδ' ἐμὸν ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ περ ἄριπρεπέα Τρώεσσι,  
 ὧδε βίην τ' ἀγαθόν, καὶ Ἰλίου ἴφι ἀνάσσειν·  
 καὶ ποτέ τις εἴποι πατρός γ' ὄδε πολλὸν ἀμείνων  
 ἐκ πολέμου ἀνιόντα: φέροι δ' ἔναρα βροτόεντα  
 κτείνας δῆμιον ἄνδρα, χαρεῖν δὲ φρένα μήτηρ.

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‘Zeus, and you other gods, grant that this boy of mine may be, like me, pre-eminent in Troy; as strong and brave as I; a mighty king of Ilium. May people say, when he comes back from battle, “Here is a better man than his father.” Let him bring home the bloodstained armour of the enemy he has killed, and make his mother happy.’

Precisely this idea of winning glory for oneself, thus preserving the honour of one’s father, which is expressed by Hector in the *Iliad*, returns again at the very end of the *Odyssey*. It seems as if the poet of both poems had kept it in mind. At the very end of the final book of the *Odyssey*, Telemachos and his father encounter some enemies. Telemachos’ grandfather Laertes is witness to the combat. Before the fight begins, Odysseus admonishes his son not to bring shame on his father’s house, and Telemachos replies accordingly (*Odyssey* 24.506–512):<sup>15</sup>

“Τηλέμαχ', ἤδη μὲν τόδε γ' εἴσει αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν,  
 ἀνδρῶν μαρναμένων ἵνα τε κρίνονται ἄριστοι,  
 μὴ τι καταισχύνειν πατέρων γένος, οἳ τὸ πάρος περ  
 ἀλκῆ τ' ἠνορήε τε κεκάσμεθα πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἴαν.”  
 τὸν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠΰδα:  
 “ὄψεαι, αἶ κ' ἐθέλησθα, πάτερ φίλε, τῶδ' ἐπὶ θυμῶ  
 οὐ τι καταισχύνοντα τεὸν γένος, ὡς ἄγορεύεις.”

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‘Telemachos, by now you will know this by yourself, as you go to the place where as men fight the best of them are decided, not to bring shame on the family of your fathers, us who in times past were outstanding in every land for our valour and courage.’ To him in turn the shrewd Telemachos replied. ‘You will see, if you like, dear father, that to match this spirit I shall not be bringing shame on your family, just as you say.’

The continuity of the heroic code’s central idea, on both sides of the battle-line, is assured when in the final scene of the *Odyssey* old Laertes is very much delighted about his son and his son’s son vying with one another in valour, having a dispute over courage, which is nothing else than another transformation of the well-known motif ‘always trying to excel’.

<sup>15</sup>The translation is from R.D. Dawe, *The Odyssey, Translation and analysis*, Lewes 1993.

2<sup>ND</sup> STEP:

In our search for some traces of the heroes' social memory in Greek epic we noticed that, although nobody speaks of it in explicit terms nor evokes it directly, it is an underlying concept of which the heroes remind themselves in critical times. Among heroes it is apparently regarded as bad form to give in to one's emotions. This is the sense of Peleus' words (remembered by Odysseus) "restrain your proud soul, keep a check on it", and of Phoinix' "conquer your pride", and finally of Ajax' phrase "be a little more forbearing".<sup>16</sup> The process of reminding (other people) and remembering (oneself) works by means of telling stories of the type 'do you remember your father's words' or 'do you remember that it was me who brought you up', namely as a hero, or 'do you remember the story of another hero like you'. Although it was impossible to get hold of Achilles, the scheme is clearly visible.

A look, however, at the departure scene between father and son in the Sophoclean *Ajax* reveals something different. The *Ajax* of Sophocles is probably the earliest of his surviving tragedies and dates back to the 50s of the fifth century.<sup>17</sup> Its setting is as follows: After Achilles died, it had to be decided who gets his weapons. Although Ajax was by far the most distinguished Greek warrior and in a way predestined to receive them – and it was he who was perceived as congenial by Achilles himself in the ninth book of the *Iliad*, – the weapons were given to Odysseus, the horribly clever arch-deceiver.<sup>18</sup> Driven mad by that decision, Ajax slaughters wildly some animals; in his frenzy, he perceives them as his former allies and friends, Agamemnon and Menelaus.<sup>19</sup> Actually at this very moment, the play begins, in the course of which Ajax becomes painstakingly aware of his own nature, his *phýsis*.<sup>20</sup>

Ajax explains himself in several speeches. During two shorter ones, which contain the central term of *phýsis* (430–480 & 545–582, *phýsis* 472 & 549),<sup>21</sup> Ajax

<sup>16</sup> The constant repetition of these catch-phrases would make them appear like a meme, if there were such 'a unit of cultural transmission'.

<sup>17</sup> H. Lloyd-Jones, however, opposes this view (*Sophocles I*, Cambridge/Mass. 1994, 9, following Wilamowitz): "Many scholars have believed *Ajax* to be an early work, alleging that it has elements of Aeschylean grandiloquence (*óγκος*); but if the passages bracketed in this text are indeed interpolated, this judgment has to be revised. To me *Ajax* seems to be a mature masterpiece, probably not much earlier than *Oedipus Tyrannus*. [...] One might, then, hazard the conjecture that (...) *Ajax* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* may belong to the thirties or the twenties [...]."

<sup>18</sup> Odysseus 'the liar' is vividly attacked by Ajax (379–382, 388sq., and again called 'wicked' 445); the chorus too hints at Odysseus' lying (187sq.).

<sup>19</sup> In Ajax' vision, Odysseus is captured and will be tortured to death separately (*Ajax* 101–117); Odysseus, present on the stage but made invisible by Athena, pities Ajax in his misery.

<sup>20</sup> The whole play of Sophocles forms a part of a larger discussion among Greek intellectuals of his time on the opposition of *phýsis* and *nómos*.

<sup>21</sup> After having begun his first speech with his father's glory (430), Ajax asks himself how to preserve his family's high reputation (462); being aware of himself as deprived of honour

declares himself unable to understand other peoples' point of view. But when he speaks for the next time in Sophocles' play, he seems to have come to terms with the decision of the Atreidae and their apparently dynamic understanding of the terms friend and enemy (646–692).<sup>22</sup> This speech, used by Ajax to deceive the public and to disguise his emotions, is spoken with reference to the Atreidae and to Odysseus, who later in the play somehow 'remembers' Ajax' words (or echoes them) when he says of himself that he is not particularly fond of a rigid mind (1361).<sup>23</sup> At this late stage of the play, Odysseus confesses that 'in truth many people are now friends and later enemies' (1359).<sup>24</sup> Due to his nature, Ajax will become a loner, done to death by his fellows for stepping out of line. He speaks his last words (815–865) to his sword only, into which he will thrust himself.

It is in the course of his second *phýsis*-speech that Ajax addresses his son Eurysakes. The central theme is the continuity of the heroic code, a theme also expressed by Hector bidding farewell to Astyanax in the *Iliad*. As Hector wanted

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(426sq.), he wants his old father Telamon not to regard him as a coward (470–472). In the second speech Ajax refers not only to the mere existence of social memory but also to its implications, i.e. preserving rules by abiding to them, thus establishing a habit for the generation to come. Accordingly, he tells Tekmessa that their little son Eurysakes may become acquainted with his 'rugged usages' or 'tough rules' in order 'to make the nature of our son like mine', as he puts it (549). Before and after the second speech, Tekmessa begs him to show regard to his father and mother (506sq. *aidesai*, twice), which means to her that he should relent (594). Ajax vehemently refuses to do so and thinks it foolish of her 'if you mean now to try to educate my character' (594sq.). Ending her plea, she reminds him not to be forgetful of her, for 'a man should remember, should some pleasure come his way'; 'it is always one kindness that begets another'; 'if a man allows the memory of a kindness to slip away, he can no longer be accounted noble' (520–524).

<sup>22</sup> But Ajax speaks rather vaguely about the terms 'friend' and 'enemy', which seem to have changed their meaning. He refers to the last developments (678–683) when he says that 'I (Ajax) have recently learned that our enemy must be hated as one who will sometime become a friend and in helping a friend I shall aim to assist him as one assists a man who will not remain a friend forever, since for most mortals the harbour of friendship cannot be trusted'. – In the last Sophoclean play, we hear something similar from Oedipus, whose words seem to echo the theme (*Oedipus Coloneus* 611–615): 'Loyalty dies and disloyalty comes into being, and the same spirit never remains between friends or between cities, since for some people now and for others in the future happy relations turn bitter, and again friendship is restored.' Oedipus is comparable to Ajax, for both share a similar feeling of loss, maybe a sense of nostalgia even for a social memory forever gone.

<sup>23</sup> Ajax is aware that other people do not share his social memory. Pretending surprise, he states that they regard categories like 'friend' and 'enemy' as rather dynamic. His analytical distance is a clear indication of his own intense awareness of being different, belonging to another and apparently somehow old-fashioned world. He must have believed in it, otherwise he would not be so ironic about the loss. That he once trusted the heroic code is well shown by his laconic speech to Achilles. Then, in the *Iliad*, he acted far more directly and not at all self-consciously. Sophocles, however, presents him far more marked by a pre-occupation with his own personality.

<sup>24</sup> Repeated by him in 1377 "I am as much a friend as I was then an enemy"; Odysseus openly confesses his selfishness in 1367 "For whom am I likely to work if not for myself?", a principle obviously guiding him.

to act according to the heroic code, so Ajax wants to preserve the heroic identity, the heroes' social memory (*Ajax* 550–559):<sup>25</sup>

ὦ παῖ, γένοιο πατρὸς εὐτυχέστερος, 550  
 τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ὅμοιος: καὶ γένοι' ἄν οὐ κακός.  
 καίτοι σε καὶ νῦν τοῦτό γε ζηλοῦν ἔχω,  
 ὀθοῦνεκ' οὐδὲν τῶνδ' ἐπαισθάνει κακῶν:  
 ἐν τῷ φρονεῖν γὰρ μηδὲν ἥδιστος βίος,  
 ἕως τὸ χαίρειν καὶ τὸ λυπεῖσθαι μάθης. 555  
 ὅταν δ' ἴκη πρὸς τοῦτο, δεῖ σ' ὅπως πατρὸς  
 δεῖξεις ἐν ἐχθροῖς, οἷος ἐξ οἴου, τράφης.  
 τέως δὲ κούφοις πνεύμασιν βόσκου, νέαν  
 ψυχὴν ἀτάλλων, μητρὶ τῆδε χαρμονήν.

'Boy, may you be luckier than your father, / but in all other ways resemble him! Then you will be no coward. / Yet even now I can envy you at least for this, / that you can sense nothing of these troubles; / because the happiest life is lived while one understands nothing, / before one learns delight or pain. / But when you come to that, you will have to show / in the presence of enemies what kind of son of what kind of father you are. / But meanwhile be fed by the gentle breezes, / nursing your young life, a delight to your mother here.'

What Ajax had to say to his little son Eurysakes is clearly modelled on two Homeric speeches. On the one hand we see a juxtaposition of an idyllic childhood and the duties of a hero quite similar to that evoked by Phoinix in his speech to Achilles. On the other hand we hear the same theme which was already mentioned by Hector in his farewell address to Astyanax, when he prayed to Zeus to make his son as brilliant a hero as he himself is.<sup>26</sup>

Yet neither Phoinix nor Hector ever spoke of luck. Nor would it have ever occurred to Achilles or to Hector to commit suicide. Ajax, however, does. It is apparent that Ajax no longer shares the same social memory with his heroic peers as Agamemnon or Menelaus, not to mention the dreadful Odysseus, this awful liar. What Ajax told Achilles in the *Iliad*, namely behave like us, return to the values you have been brought up with, has become idle talk, worthless propaganda. It no longer makes sense to behave like a hero among heroes. What was hailed as part of the solution in the *Iliad*, is now part of the problem. Heroic values had become outdated, and Achilles in the *Iliad* seems to have been already aware of this erosion of heroic ideals, when he insulted Agamemnon. Now Sophocles highlights the ironic

<sup>25</sup>The translation is by H. Lloyd-Jones and appeared in the Loeb-edition of Sophocles in 1994.

<sup>26</sup>In *Iliad* 6.481 Hector wishes that his son may make his mother happy returning home with the bloodstained armour of the enemy, i.e. when he is no longer a boy, but already an adult, while the Sophoclean Ajax speaks of happy moments in the relation between mother and son during the boy's childhood. This contrasting imitation is another indication of Sophocles' referring to Hector's address in the *Iliad*.



perversity of the heroic code because the only one, who sticks to it and keeps up its rules, is rejected by his fellow heroes and feels compelled to kill himself.

In Sophocles, the Homeric text is still recognizable. The audience of those days was familiar with it and able to understand the Sophoclean interplay. Encountering the new managerial type of dealing with ethical questions, Ajax is unable to adapt. It is highly ironic that he, who advised Achilles to behave like a hero (i.e. to pull himself together), now contemplates committing suicide for fear of becoming a ridiculous, despicable, nondescript figure as all the other heroes already are in his perception.<sup>27</sup> In Sophocles' play, Ajax perceives the world as Achilles anticipated it in the Homeric *Iliad*, full of liars.<sup>28</sup>

### 3<sup>RD</sup> AND FINAL STEP:

The scenery travels on, and two Latin texts mention the *exemplaria Graeca*. The Roman tragedian Accius<sup>29</sup> translated rather literally the Sophoclean *Ajax*. One fragment of his *Judgment of the Arms* brings the Greek departure scene to Rome (*Armorum iudicium* 156 Ribbeck & D'Anto', 123 Warmington, 171 Dangel):

virtuti sis par, dispar fortunis patris

regarding virtue, be equal to your father, match him, rival with him, but regarding his fate, his fortunes, his social condition, differ from him, become dissimilar.

<sup>27</sup>How Ajax changed is indicated by Tecmessa, who tells the chorus that Ajax now laments with dreadful cries, he who always used to teach that such weeping was the mark of a cowardly and spiritless man (*Ajax* 317–320). – Addressing Menelaus, Teucros expresses his strong dislike of the 'nobodies' (1114); on that theme of others who literally live on, but are petty and nonentities, cf. S.J. Instone, 'Darkness, my Light': *Enigmatic Ajax*, [in:] P.J. Finglass, C. Collard, N.J. Richardson (edd.), *Hesperos, Studies in Ancient Greek Poetry Presented to M.L. West on his Seventieth Birthday*, Oxford 2007, pp. 228–238 (in particular p. 237).

<sup>28</sup>Heroic memory had become the underlying text in a palimpsest, where a new layer is written upon it. – Repeating the departure scene between father and son (*Ajax* 762–777), Sophocles depends even more on the Homeric text. Telling Achilles not only 'always to excel' (*Iliad* 11.784), but also to 'restrain the proud soul' (*Iliad* 9.255sq.), Peleus acted as if had known what was to come, namely that his son would be unable to control his emotional life. Bidding farewell to his son Ajax, the identical attitude is shown by Telamon, wishing that his son may triumph in battle – but only with a god's aid. Telamon's fear that his son might become unmanageable is immediately confirmed by Ajax boldly replying that he would not need the gods for his triumph. Ajax commits the same error a second time: When Athena urges him on, he tells her to support the other fighters, because he would manage to overcome the enemy without her. Replying boastfully and stupidly to his father (766) and by answering with dreadful and unspeakable words to the goddess (773), Ajax sealed his fate. Cf. e.g. N.R.E. Fisher, *Hybris and Dishonour II*, „Greece and Rome" 26, 1979, pp. 32–47 (in particular p. 35).

<sup>29</sup>As an old man admired by the young, still unknown Cicero, who spoke to him several times as he claims in his *Brutus* 28.107.

Accius' rendering of Sophocles makes the expression more concise. Due to Accius' antithesis of *virtus* and *fortuna*, Ajax now sounds even more philosophical than he did in Greek.<sup>30</sup> The line of Accius' play is preserved by Macrobius in order to show that Virgil borrowed from his Latin poetic predecessors (*Saturnalia* 6.1.58). Virgil translates the scene rather metaphorically when he lets his Aeneas say something similar to his departing son Ascanius (*Aeneid* 12.435–440):<sup>31</sup>

*disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem, / fortunam ex aliis. Nunc te mea dextera bello / defensum dabit et magna inter praemia ducet. / Tu facito, mox cum matura adoleverit aetas, / sis memor, et te animo repetentem exempla tuorum / et pater Aeneas et avunculus excitet Hector.*

*Learn valour from me, my son, and true endurance; / fortune from others! Now my right hand shall hold you secure in war / and lead you where are great rewards: / your care be it to remember this, when soon your years have grown to ripeness, / be mindful, when you recall the pattern of your kin, the example of your kindred, / let your father Aeneas, and your uncle Hector stir your soul, urge you on!*

Hector addressing his son Astyanax, Ajax speaking to Eurysakes, and Aeneas now admonishing Ascanius – three fathers who urge their sons to keep in mind what they are, namely heroic sons of heroes. Virgil, our most recent example, is aware of the fact that the situation he evokes is not for the first time a subject of literature, because his Aeneas reminds his son *expressis verbis* not only to be not forgetful of his ancestors, but mentions also the name of his Iliadic predecessor Hector, who as the brother of Aeneas' wife Creusa is uncle to Ascanius. Thus Virgil hints directly at one underlying subtext of his scenery, the Homeric one. The other subtext, the Sophoclean one, makes the line so complex:<sup>32</sup> The theme of 'become such a hero as your father' is no longer simply a topic of heroic grandeur well known from Homer, but also of tragic failure first brought on stage by Sophocles.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>A standard topic of many a speech and treatise at the orator schools in his days; cf. e.g. K. Heitmann, *Fortuna und virtus, Eine Studie zu Petrarca's Lebensweisheit*, Köln 1958.

<sup>31</sup>Translated by John Jackson, Oxford 1908.

<sup>32</sup>A Callimachean reading would see two treatments of one motif at the same time, two layers attached to one text.

<sup>33</sup>Half a century after his *Ajax*, Sophocles seems to have been concerned with social memory again in his *Philoktetes*. The *Philoktetes*, performed in 409, is one of Sophocles' latest plays. We see Odysseus trying to persuade Neoptolemos to tell Philoktetes a lie in order to get his bow without which Troy could not be conquered. Odysseus says openly that this behaviour, i.e. lying among heroes, does not form part of Neoptolemos' nature (79sq.), and Neoptolemos readily agrees that neither he nor his father would have envisaged lying as an option. But, for the time being, he does what Odysseus wants him to do, disregards his *phýsis*, plays the dirty game, gets hold of the bow. Later on however, declaring several times to Philoktetes how sorry he had felt for him already for some time (806, 906b = 913b, 965sq.), Neoptolemos regrets having abandoned his nature. In a longer passage, the heroic code, Neoptolemos' temporarily forgotten, pent-up, and

The departure-scene between a father and a son turned out to be a crucial moment. In light of the new concept ‘social memory’ it is no wonder that the central message of the heroic code, ‘always try to excel’, forms a part of the conversation, because this phrase and those connected with it, as ‘do not put your family to shame’, ‘remember your father’s glory’, etc., define the social memory of the heroic society. In a defining moment, they cannot be omitted. Literary texts, which contain and transmit these phrases, become themselves part of the social memory of a society. As fictitious as the Homeric society depicted by the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* may have been – their values were understandable to their protagonists and to their audience as well. Thus the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* inform us about the social memory of a period which is no longer accessible to us. We would know nothing about it without literary texts containing these scenes, transforming and adapting them constantly to a new purpose. Aware of the tradition, Virgil did not forget a scene he knew very well.

At the end of my plaidoyer in defence of social memory stands an author who was so familiar with so many literary traditions, that his works became the classical texts of our European civilization. But he tells us also something about his contemporary world, the early days of the Augustan society. It is his work which illuminates the society within which it is produced. His texts make sense in terms of the attitudes of that society and show how they work. And his audience wanted to hear this Homerizing stuff they already knew from their private tutors. Whether they liked it or not, Augustus did. By revealing this attitude, the Virgilian text became itself a kind of memory of a society. At least, for one interested in social memory it may be tempting to read him that way, too.

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betrayed social memory does return. He explains the whole intrigue to Philoktetes and feels himself compelled to return the bow to him. Then, during an agitated discussion, Neoptolemos, who is regarded by Philoktetes as too good for Odysseus (1009–1012) but rather on a par with himself, explains his decision to Odysseus, who asks in return whether Neoptolemos was kidding. Neoptolemos replies that of course not, only if telling the truth would be regarded as such. Both apparently do not share the same social memory, the rules which compel the one and because of which he is convinced to do the right thing, are ridiculous for the other, simply bad jokes. Helping the hero whom he was expected to deceive, Neoptolemos finally regains the heroes’ social memory.