Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the *Iliad*

From beginning to end of the *Iliad*, Agamemnon and Achilles are locked in a high-stakes struggle for dominance in which they attempt to impose competing definitions of rightful leadership, using competing definitions of loss incurred and the nature of the compensation owed. A typology of scenes involving *apoïna* or "ransom" and *poïne* or "revenge" is the basis of Donna Wilson’s detailed anthropology of compensation in Homer, which she locates in the wider context of agonistic exchange. Wilson argues that a struggle over definitions is a central feature of elite competition for status in the zero-sum and fluid ranking system that is characteristic of Homeric society. This system can be used to explain why Achilles refuses Agamemnon’s “compensation” in Book 9, as well as why and how the embassy tries to disguise it. *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* examines the traditional semantic, cultural, and poetic matrix of which compensation in Homer is an integral part.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book emerged from a dissertation presented to the faculty of the University of Texas in 1997 under the title *The Politics of Compensation in the Homeric Iliad*. The dissertation itself grew out of a presentation in a graduate seminar on the *Iliad*, though my interest in the poetics and politics of compensation was sparked much earlier in a Jewish studies seminar on Oral Torah. It has been my good fortune to have at every stage of this project a wealth of colleagues, teachers, and friends who invested their time, energy, and expertise in my work. It is a pleasure to thank them.

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All translations of the Iliad are based on that of Lattimore (© 1951 by the University of Chicago Press), but with adjustments, and are used by permission of the University of Chicago Press. All other translations are my own.

Except where ambiguity might arise, references to the Iliad are by book and line number, without the name of the poem; Od. is used to cite the Odyssey. The Greek in the text and in the footnotes is translated with the exception of a few technical notes in appendix 1. I follow Lattimore's spelling of Greek names and transliterate other Greek words analogously, if not entirely consistently (e.g., upsilon is usually transliterated as u but chi as kh). Finally, there are a few Greek words that figure prominently in my discussion and that admit of no single translation that adequately compasses their thematic usage in the Iliad. I gloss or explain the thematic significance of these terms the first time they appear in the text; I then transliterate without translating them. For easy reference, I include here a list of these terms with the barest of definitions:

- apoina: ransom
- biē: force, violence
- dōra: gifts (pl.)
- éris: strife
- klos (aphθitōn): (unfading) fame, glory
- mētis: cunning intelligence
- poinē: repayment for loss; reparation or revenge
- polis (pl., polis): city (a form of Greek sociopolitical organization dating from the eighth century B.C.E.)
Preface and Acknowledgments

And now it remains only to acknowledge my own heroes: my children, Joel, Amanda, and Colin, whose patience and good humor with a mother who became an academic go beyond the call of duty; my mother, Berneda Wilson, who always believes in me; and my father, Thomas Wilson, whose memory is the wind beneath my wings. It is to them that this book is dedicated.
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