

Iamze Gagua (Tbilisi)

MORAL CODE OF EPIC HEROES

(*Iliad*, *Aeneid*, and *The Knight in The Panther's Skin*)

Every era and every nation produce their heroes. The names of ideal heroes immortalized in arts and literature are transmitted from generation to generation. What are the features of heroism? What are the criteria used to identify it? What are the norms of behaviour universally acceptable or unacceptable for all eras and nations?

War as the greatest of evils promotes such features in people (cruelty, rage, ruthlessness) that are inadmissible in peacetime, but war introduces its moral laws. What are the parameters of war ethics? What are the features of a kind fighter? Answers to the questions can be found in literary masterpieces like Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*.¹

To highlight features of ideal heroes, it is necessary to concentrate on the following issues: 1. Outward appearance and physical force; 2. War and justness; 3. Temperance in cruel war; 4. Approach to loot; 5. Tolerance; 6. Repentance.

Outward appearance and physical force are indispensable for heroes. Heroes stand out with their appearance, force, and courage. Armed

¹ Examples quoted in this article are taken from the following editions: Homer, vol. I, *Iliad*, Books 1-12, translated by William Wyatt, A. T. Murray, 1924; Homer, vol. II, *Iliad*, Books 13-24, translated by A. T. Murray, 1925; Virgil, vol. I, *Eclogues, Georgics; Aeneid*, Books 1-6, revised edition, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, Revised by G. P. Goold, 1916; Virgil, vol. II, *Aeneid*, Books 7-12, Appendix Vergiliana, edited and translated by H. R. Fairclough, Revised by G. P. Goold, 1918; Shota Rustaveli, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, Tbilisi 1987 (according to the anniversary edition of 1966) (*in Georgian*).

Achilles is bathed in light like Ares. He is outstanding among Achaean fighters. Odysseus describes him as an unequalled fighter and no one can be compared with him in courage, although Odysseus is wiser (XIX, 155; XIX, 216-219). Achilles admits that no one is equal to him in the battlefield, but he is no better than others in the agora. Achilles' appearance in the battlefield terrifies enemies. His fearlessness and appearance can be compared with those of the god of war (X, 45-47). Achilles is powerful (VIII, 553), fierce, fearless (VIII, 589), terrible, rabid (XIII, 589), and stalwart (XVIII, 121) and his constant epithet is swift-footed (ποδῶρης). Not only Achilles' appearance, but also his sharp and piercing voice leaves enemies awestruck (XVIII, 221-223).

Like Achilles, the protagonist of *Aeneid*, Aeneas, stands out among Trojans with his beauty. He looks like very beautiful god Apollo. The poem refers to his manly and divine beauty on a lot of occasions (IV, 141-144; I, 588-589). Beauty and courage are equally visible in Aeneas' appearance. Queen of Carthage Dido was immediately charmed by the Trojan hero, when she saw him (IV, 3-5; IV, 11). Aeneas stands out with his other features: he is *pius* (I, 220; XII, 175), very just (I, 544-545), and great-hearted (I, 260), and his constant epithet is father (*pater*) (I, 580; VIII, 28).

The protagonist of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, Tariel, is also enticing with his build. He attracts attention immediately (628). Tariel's appearance is described in the poem on many occasions. He is compared with the sun and his force with that of lion's. Like Achilles, Tariel stands out with his force and voice (1, 416).

Other heroes in *Iliad*, *Aeneid*, and *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* are also good-looking, courageous, bold, and fierce in battle, but protagonists nevertheless stand out with something that makes them better than others and that is not only their outward appearance or particular force.

Heroes must definitely be strong, courageous, and bold, but these are external features. Physical force is a gift from God and has little to do with heroes' internal world. In *Iliad*, Agamemnon reproves Achilles, telling him that although he is powerful – *κρατερός*, that is gods' gift (I, 178).

Rustaveli also thinks that people should not be proud of their physical force, as it is a gift from God. A mortal cannot win a victory with this force without God's will (1046).

As regards courage and boldness, they also depend on God's will. When Avtandil decides to fight against pirates alone, he explains to surprised caravan owners that his courage and boldness are due to God's will (1038).

The merchants, whom he saved, thank Avtandil, but he believes that this is just God's gift and he should not be credited (1050).

That is why arrogance and pride in his courage are alien to Avtandil.

War and Justness. Not only courage, outward appearance and physical force are among heroes' features. What is war and what role does it play in the life of heroes? What are the purposes and motives of Achilles, Aeneas, and Tariel? For the protagonists of Homer, Virgil, and Rustaveli, war is an internal need and activity indispensable for the existence and strength of the state, a means for self-assertion, and an arena to show their courage. It is just for Hellenes to fight against Troy, because they are to take revenge for Helen's abduction, but Trojans are also right, as they protect their homeland. Achilles' personal purpose in the Trojan War is fame. He knows that he will prolong his life, if he does not participate in the campaign, but he will not become glorious (IX, 412-415). That is why Achilles, who is infuriated by Agamemnon, is in no hurry to go back home and suffers from remaining idle. This is why he is thrown into turmoil.

Aeneas' struggle in Italy is just, because he fulfils gods' will. Aeneas tries to obtain permanent residence in Latium peacefully. He addresses the king of Latium, Latinus, whom gods told that he would marry his daughter off to a foreigner and this union would strengthen and glorify his kingdom, but the glory would be followed by a war (VII, 79-80). Aeneas entreats Latinus to give refuge to fleeing Trojans, promising that instead, they will fight to protect and strengthen Latinus' kingdom (I, 229-240).

It is noteworthy that Aeneas asks Latinus not to scorn them, because they came to him with words of prayer and peace-ribbons (VII, 237-240). Why should this be demeaning to Aeneas? He seems to be afraid that appearing before the king with his head bowed can be taken as cowardice, but there is no other way out for Aeneas. He has to entreat and ask for what has been decided by gods. However, Turnus does not allow Trojans to settle peacefully. He forces King Latinus to violate the truce with Aeneas. Aeneas also fights to support some Italian tribes oppressed by Etruscan King Mezentius and Rutulians. In spite of this, Aeneas is internally concerned by the fact that he, a foreigner, is disputing with a local, Turnus, over land (XII, 581-582).

Aeneas is not preparing for war. He is concerned about being obliged to become involved in this unfortunate war (III, 29). Tiberinus, deity of the River Tiber, calms him down and advises not to reject military action and not to fear war (III, 40). Aeneas does not want to wage war, but he cannot

stand up to the will of gods.² *Pius* Aeneas, who is a refugee, is seeking for a second homeland, which gods have pointed to. He is obliged to accept Turnus' challenge, but he is nevertheless in no hurry and is waiting for the enemy to attack. The Trojan hero does not become involved in war until he receives a divine sign from heavens. Aeneas becomes convinced that war is inevitable, so he is psychologically ready to fight, which becomes clear in his threat to Turnus (VIII, 534-540).

Tariel is fighting to save his beloved princess held captive by evil spirits. Therefore, his war is just too. As regards the war against Khataeti, it has another ground. Tariel wants to make his rebel subordinate surrender, i. e. protect the unity of the Indian Kingdom, and King Ramaz of Khataeti is putting up resistance, because he wants to gain independence for his country. His disobedience could have been regarded as just and courageous, had Ramaz engaged himself in a face-to-face fight against Tariel. Flattery and obsequiousness prevent King Ramaz from being Tariel's worthy rival.

Temperance in Cruel War. Poets show protagonists' physical force in cruel pictures of battles. Achilles fills the River Xanthus with the enemies' fighters he killed. Achilles does not pay heed to the frightened enemies' pleas and kills his rivals mercilessly (XXI, 116-119). He explains his cruelty in the following manner: before Patroclus was dead, he was able to spare enemies, but there is no one who would arouse his compassion after his death. In addition, the son of Peleus believes that even the most courageous man cannot avoid death. Therefore, all fighters should tolerate the fate. Achilles says that he cannot avoid his fate either and enemies will kill him in a battle (XXI, 110-114).

Aeneas' struggle against Rutulians is also rabid (X, 552-556; X, 586-589). He kills enemies mercilessly (X, 585-602), but he is nevertheless *pius*, because he is fighting for a just cause. He is sometimes cruel, but this is the way for him to achieve peace. This is the merciless logic of war³ and even noble heroes cannot disregard it. However, we cannot perceive Aeneas' struggle as wild cruelty, which is not true of his rival Turnus, who fixed the heads of defeated fighters on raised spears and admired the sight (IX, 462-466). Turnus is pleased to see killed Pallas and is delighted to imagine what the father of the young man will feel, when he sees the lifeless body of his son (IX, 758-760). Turnus is force and arrogance.⁴ The chimera on his helmet is an allusion to this.⁵

² Gleis R. F., *Der Vater der Dinge*, BAC, B. 7, Trier, 287.

³ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

⁴ Wisthore S. F., *Public and Private in Vergil's Aeneid*, The University of Massachusetts

Homer and Virgil describe in a naturalist manner a lot of scenes of rabid battles. The names of almost all heroes are specified in *Iliad* and *Aeneid*. We know exact names of the people, who Achilles and Aeneas fight with. However, Rustaveli's protagonists usually fight against nameless armies. Scenes of battles are not so lengthy in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*. Several strophes are sometimes sufficient for Rustaveli to describe a battle, but the passages attract attention with their poetic sonority and alliterations (447, 558).

Approach to loot. The character of heroes can be seen very well in their attitude towards loot, which is an award and compensation for courageous fighting. Fighters divide among each other captives, weaponry, gold, and silver on the basis of who made what contribution to victory. Correspondingly, the degree of a fighter's courage is defined by this award. Therefore, it is legal to accept it and appropriate arguments are necessary to reject it, if such thing is to happen. Precious weaponry of enemies is particularly attractive for fighters. Hector tries to obtain Achilles' weapons (XXII, 125-127) and Agamemnon also takes enemies' weapons (XI, 247). As regards Achilles, it is because of the weapons he was deprived of that he confronts Agamemnon. A hero receives material and spiritual respect for his courage ἡ τιμή and τὸ δῶρον. However, δῶρον alone cannot compensate τιμή. That is why Achilles rejects gifts from Agamemnon on both occasions. His second refusal is undoubtedly due to his reluctance to cast a shadow on the reason for his renewed involvement in the war – revenge for his friend's death. Although Achilles does not renounce the treasure (XVI, 84-86), it should be deserved in battles, not presented by Agamemnon. Precious presents offered by Agamemnon are no compensation for Achilles' humiliation. The denial to accept presents is an obstacle for full reconciliation, as it is contrary to ethical norms.⁶ According to *Iliad*, it is not prohibited for heroes to receive a ransom from enemies. That even seems to be necessary. Gods are concerned about Achilles' refusal to take a ransom and return Hector's dead body (XXIV, 115). It is Zeus' will that Iris convince Priam to meet Achilles with gifts that may please him (XXIV, 119, 146-147). Mother Thetis tells her son to accept the ransom and return Hector's body (XXIV, 137).

Loot is a sign of glory for Virgil too and its division among fighters is an ordinary rule. Enemies' precious weapons are the best treasure. They

Press, Amherst 1989, 96.

⁵ Buccheit V., *Vergil uber die Sendung Roms*, Heidelberg 1963, 92-93.

⁶ Шталь И., *Художественный мир гомеровского эпоса*, Москва 1983, 128.

are a symbol of victory (X, 449-450). Mezentius gives his son Lausus the weapons of defeated enemies (X, 700-701) and promises that he will also give him Aeneas' weapons soon (X, 774-776). This is nothing unusual. However, it is unethical and unreasonable to covet loot or rejoice at them (X, 495-500). In *Aeneid*, enemies' weapons always bring trouble to fighters. They seem to be pursued by the previous owners' fate (X, 700-710; II, 410-413).

This means that enemies' weaponry does not belong to victors and should be donated to the deity of war. This is what Aeneas does (X, 542). Pallas also promises to donate enemies' weaponry to the deity of war (X, 424). Aeneas sees a lot of weapons of defeated enemies in Latinus' palace (X, 700-710). The only episode in *Aeneid*, in which the victor does not take the weapons of defeated enemies and does not donate them to the deity of war, is that of Lausus (X, 825-830).

Rustaveli's heroes bring countless treasures from Khataeti (455) and the country of evil spirits (1429). The treasures belong to the army and country. Tariel chooses only two things from the treasury: an exotic knitted veil and a short woman's jacket. The two things attract him, as they are matchless pieces of art, which he presents to his beloved woman (460-462). Rustaveli's heroes do not covet loot. Avtandil refuses to take pirates' loot, although he was the only one, who gained it (1054).

It is noteworthy that protagonists do not use looted weapons in battles. They become involved in important battles with new weapons. Hephaestus makes new weaponry for Achilles and Vulcanus for Aeneas. Tariel, Avtandil, and Pridon open giants' chest before the war against evil spirits. There are three weapons in the chest meant for heroes, who are to combat the spirits (1368).

Tolerance. Is it a norm for a hero to pity his enemy, to show him mercy, not to deprive him of weapons, and not to insult his dead body? Such behaviour adds to a hero's dignity. Achilles does not listen to Hector's pleas not to abandon his body dishonourably after his death, but moved by Priam's request, returns the son's dead body to his father. Moreover, he does not let the father see his son's dishonoured body until he gives it proper treatment. Achilles does this with great tact and warmth.

How justified is Achilles' action regarding Hector's dead body? Is it a crime to dishonour an enemy's dead body? Why does Apollo reprimand him for this? Dishonouring an enemy's dead body is nothing unusual. Hector himself tries to get hold of Patroclus' dead body and weapons (XVII, 125-127). It is believed that a hero does not have the right to dishonour his enemy's dead body, if the latter is as courageous as the former. This is why Apollo and other gods reprimand Achilles. The poem

does not make it quite obvious that Achilles does not have the right to dishonour Hector's dead body. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why Achilles asks Patroclus' ghost to forgive him for returning Hector's body to his father (XXIV, 592-595). In addition, Achilles stealthily sends back Priam to Trojans to prevent Achaeans from seeing him and letting Agamemnon know, as the latter can hinder the old man from returning home (XXIV, 654-655). This means that Achilles' behaviour may offend Achaeans. If there is any rule, which can be discussed, it implies that a hero must cede the dead body to relatives after he receives a ransom. This is what gods advise Achilles: to calm his rage down, take the ransom, and return Hector's dead body (XXIV, 139). Of course, gods can stealthily take Hector's body (which is some of the gods decision - XXIV, 24, 104), but Zeus does not allow them to do so, because this will diminish Achilles' glory (XXIV, 110). This is important, as a hero cannot gain glory through violence against his enemy's soulless body (XXIV, 41-42; XXIV, 44-45).

After listening to his mother's advice, Achilles is ready to take ransom and return Hector's dead body to Priam. However, after his meeting with Priam, it is his personal desire to have mercy on the entreating man.

Aeneas is not a pitiless hero. He is ready to pay heed to Turnus' pleas and leave him alive, but when he notices young Pallas' belt on him, he becomes angry and kills his rival mercilessly. As regards Lausus, whom he kills, Aeneas is so charmed by his courage that he does not take his weapons and takes care to ensure that his relatives can bury him in a worthy manner (X, 825-830).

Aeneas takes pity on the defeated enemies and does not kill them (XII, 464-465). He forgives the entreating enemies, who ask for the dead bodies of their fellow fighters. Like Achilles, Aeneas calls a truce for 12 days to allow them to take care of the deceased people's souls (XI, 65-105). Turnus' fighters are surprised by Aeneas' nobility and glorify him (XI, 124-127).

Showing enemies mercy is nothing unusual for Tariel. He immediately agrees with King Parsadan's request to pity King Ramaz (465). He forgives King Ramaz, who asks for forgiveness for himself and the queen. According to Rustaveli's concept, it is great honour for a hero to forgive his defeated enemy, but this must not be detrimental to the state. Tariel forgives King Ramaz, but reminds him that he must not forget to pay the tribute (1648).

Forgiving enemies is not an obligatory norm of the war ethics, but it adds honour to heroes.

Repentance. Heroes sometimes realize that they made a mistake or committed a crime and they repent. Repentance is a precondition for a

spiritual victory. Repentance takes possession of Achilles after Patroclus' death. He is concerned, because he failed to help his friend or Achaeans (XVIII, 102-106). Achilles believes it was a mistake when he failed to overcome rage against Agamemnon (XVIII, 106-107) and Agamemnon also tries to justify himself before the army, ascribing his offensive behaviour to gods and maintaining that he quarrelled with the unrivalled Achaean hero in accordance with their will.

Aeneas does not express repentance for any of his actions. Although he is concerned about the fate of Dido, whom he abandoned, he does not regard this as his personal misdeed. However, others in *Aeneid* repent their behaviour. Turnus does so before his death (XII, 931), as well as King Latinus, who failed to observe the truce with Aeneas (XII, 612-613). King Ramaz, who was defeated by Tariel, regrets that he started a campaign against Tariel and is ready to be fully responsible for the crime he committed in exchange for immunity for his army (1611). This confession and care for innocent soldiers is undoubtedly a very noble move by King Ramaz, as ordinary people should not be punished for the steps and unreasonable decisions of their rulers.

Let us now consider what may be regarded as inappropriate behaviour of heroes and why they sometimes violate ethic norms. Stabbing enemies in the back or stealthily killing them is inappropriate for heroes. Achilles and Aeneas did not do anything like that, but there are nevertheless such examples in *Iliad* and *Aeneid*. Achaeans have to kill their sleeping enemies and Aeneas' companions also attack sleeping rivals.

Heroes in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* also find themselves in such undesirable situations. They sometimes avoid becoming involved in battles, but of course, not because they are cowards. Avtandil kills the sleeping Tchashnagir, because he believes that he is not an equal rival (1110). Tariel also kills Nestan's bridegroom albeit after some hesitation, because Nestan insists on his doing so (542). He substantiates his plan, saying that this is a way out of the situation that has taken shape and that it is better to kill one man than the whole army.

It is no surprise that heroes make mistakes in extreme situations. Heroes sometimes find themselves facing an unexpected dilemma and they have no time for thinking. Homer's, Virgil's, and Rustaveli's heroes are not unmakeable. They are mortals and human weaknesses are not unknown to them. That is why their behaviour is always convincing – both when they violate ethic norms in extreme situations and when they act in accordance with moral norms.