

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

DIOMEDES

Frederic Will, Ph.D.

(in Homer's *Iliad*) introvert

Overview The *Iliad* of Homer concerns the Greek victory over the Trojan forces in the anciently famous, if possibly fictional, Battle over the Citadel of Troy. (13th or 14th centuries B.C.) The Greek forces assembled from all over the Eastern Mediterranean, led by their greatest regional heroes: Agamemnon, Achilles, Diomedes, Patroclus, Nestor. In the heat of battle heroes from all regions of the Greek world were intermixed, now one now another prominent in the front lines. Diomedes excels in hand to hand combat, and leads many of the decisive Greek sallies into Trojan lines.

Character Introvert? Diomedes is driven from within into one brutal attack after another. He seems almost more a force of nature than an individual, though his lineage marks him out as of distinguished background. Diomedes was the king of the people of Argos, and was customarily compared with Ajax as the most powerful Greek warrior, usually worshipped as divine. His military prowess, like that of Odysseus, relied heavily on ambush and guerilla tactics, guile followed by brutal assault. It is hardly to be wondered that this ruler, and military man's man, should have been one of the many suitors of Helen in the 'old days.' Diomedes is not open out into the world, except perhaps as a fighting machine; he is not a psychology, not a philosopher, and least of all a born leader, but is closer to Rambo than to any of those types

Parallels By nature the powerful warrior does not lend himself to fine tuned literary characterization. To give your all to the battle, to slug it out, is to shut out many of your social awarenesses and skills. There are however warriors, like Achilles and Beowulf, who have depth and subtlety even as fighters. Achilles is a sulky fighter, whose honor has to be deeply touched—as in the killing of Patroclus—before he will storm into battle, but when he starts to kill he is as ruthless and clean cut as Diomedes. The 8th century epic of *Beowulf* depicts a noble hero, dragon slayer and slayer of the evil, who morphs, in his old age, into sagacity and effective leadership. By contrast, a warrior type like Rambo, memorably depicted on screen by Sylvester Stallone, is a PTSD driven comet of fury, who is unpredictable and violent in mortal combat.

Illustrative moments

Power Diomedes brings brute strength to his every action in combat. 'He spake and leapt in his armour from the chariot to earth, and terribly rang the bronze upon the chieftain's breast as he moved; thereat might fear have come even upon one stout-hearted.' The force of the Greek army gathers around the hero and surges like the waves of the ocean, in rhythmic access of power, against the Trojans—compared in this instance in Book IV to a mass of sheep speaking different languages, and scattered by the Greek power. As often happens, in these hand to hand combats, Diomedes is the quiet powerful force around whom the assembled Greek might coagulates.

Divine The power of Diomedes, like that of the greatest Greek heroes Achilles and Odysseus, is fed by the divine. Pallas Athene is the special patron of Diomedes, as she is of Odysseus. 'But now to Tydeus' son Diomedes Pallas Athene gave might and courage, for him to be pre-eminent amid all the Argives and win glorious renown.' Her intervention is sharp and intense: 'she kindled flame unwearied from his helmet and shield, like to the star of summer that above all others glittereth bright after he hath bathed in the ocean stream. In such wise kindled she flame from his head and shoulders and sent him into the midst, where men thronged the thickest.' In the midst is usually where we encounter Diomedes, thrashing this way and that, hewing a path of corpses wherever he turns.

Brutal Pandaros, one of the finest marksmen of the Trojans, takes aim against Diomedes. Having failed first with his arrow, he shifts to his spear, 'if I can hit thee.' Pandaros' spear crashes against Diomedes' shield, emboldening the thrower to claim: 'Thou art smitten on the belly right through.' Diomedes, however, assures the thrower that he has missed his target. Diomedes takes his own spear and hurls, 'and

Athene guided the dart upon his nose, beside the eye, and it pierced through his white teeth..’ Thence the bronze cut through Pandaros’ ‘tongue at the root and the point issued forth by the base of the chin.’

Brawler Diomedes (Book V) and Aeneas engage in constant brawling, the strongest vs. the strongest. In the midst of a chatty conversation between Zeus and Aphrodite, Diomedes ‘of the loud war-cry’ jumped Aeneas, though fully aware that Apollo had spread an embrace of protection over his own favorite. Yet even this divine protection, shed over Aeneas, was not enough to discourage Diomedes. Only then did Apollo turn on his wrath full force. With that force to contend with, Diomedes at last withdrew, but only then, and only after Apollo had withdrawn his favorite to a safe shelter.

Discussion questions

Diomedes as introvert? Make sense? This hero lives around his honor, his defence of himself and of his team, and pure outpouring military prowess. Can you see how that adds up to introversion?

What do you think of the hand to hand combat scenes, in the *Iliad*, as literary experience? Are they compelling? Subtle?

Do you see a distinctive connection between Pallas Athena and Diomedes? Do they share characteristics? How does divine lineage impact the actions of Diomedes?