

# Between Lions and Men: Images of the Hero in the *Iliad*

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IF THE BEAST-SIMILES of the *Iliad* appear easy to understand, this is because they correspond formally to one of the simplest types of comparison found in poetry of the modern European tradition. As a rule our own culture encourages us only to contrast the human world with that of animals, so that an image drawing them together seems trivial: we know we are dealing in tropes when Shakespeare calls the Black Prince a "lion's whelp" or when Byron says that "the Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold."<sup>1</sup> As such things are not taken as expressions of deep ideas, the habit of analogy makes it easy to assume that the beast-similes of the *Iliad* are likewise an external ornament rather than a serious part of Homer's evocation of the heroic age. In the past this prejudice led even to the strange belief that they are designed to relieve the monotony of repeated battles;<sup>2</sup> and although more recent years have seen many fruitful studies of the similes' rôle in amplifying the narrative,<sup>3</sup> there is room for further inquiry into their deeper

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, *Henry V* i.2.109; Byron, "The Destruction of Sennacherib" (1815) 1.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. C. M. Bowra in A. J. B. Wace and F. H. Stubbings, edd., *A Companion to Homer* (London 1963) 70; G. P. Shipp, "General Remarks on Similes," in his *Studies in the Language of Homer* (Cambridge 1972) 208-22, esp. 212 on "Homer's love of pictorial effect, of the picturesque scene"; cf. W. C. Scott, *The Oral Nature of the Homeric Simile* (= *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 28 [Leiden 1974: hereafter 'Scott']) 4-7, 31ff.

<sup>3</sup> For thorough treatments of beast-similes with regard primarily to their form and decorative function, see esp. H. FRÄNKEL, *Die homerischen Gleichnisse* (Göttingen 1921: hereafter 'Fränkel') 71-86; C. MOULTON, *Similes in the Homeric Poems* (= *Hypomnemata* 49 [Göttingen 1979: 'Moulton']) esp. 139ff; Scott 58-62; S. LONSDALE, *Lion, Hunting and Herding Similes in the Iliad* (Stuttgart 1990: 'Lonsdale') *passim*.

meaning in relation to the central themes of the epic.<sup>4</sup> My aim here is to work from a single example to suggest that the symbolism of aggressive wild animals is much more than a matter of style, and that they play a major part in Homer's portrayal of the ethical and psychological problems of heroism. The argument will mostly concern lions, the subject of the most prominent similes in the group, but it will also draw on similes of leopards, wolves, and boars. Although these latter species—especially wolves—have different associations in other areas of Greek lore, in the similes they are portrayed in such similar ways that it makes sense to take them together with lions as a group with a single poetic rôle.<sup>5</sup>

### Similes in Co-ordinated Systems

In past generations of scholarship much effort was spent on trying to understand similes by isolating the precise point of comparison (*Vergleichspunkt, tertium comparationis*) at the

<sup>4</sup> For the approach to similes taken in this paper cf. esp. M. Coffey, "The Function of the Homeric Simile," *AJP* 78 (1957) 113–32; M. W. Edwards, *Homer, Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore 1977) 102–10; and on beast-similes in particular note the structuralist approach by A. Schnapp-Gourbeillon, *Lions, héros, masques: les représentations de l'animal chez Homère* (Paris 1981). Of great interest also is G. P. Rose's study of a kindred but distinct theme in the *Odyssey*: "Odysseus' Barking Heart," *TAPA* 109 (1979) 215–30.

<sup>5</sup> Obviously there are important differences in real life between these species and their different kinds of enmity with men, but in Homeric practice there is no discernible contrast in the way they are described and the qualities they embody. Two or more species are often co-ordinated as the subject of a single simile, so that the emphasis seems to be on the strength, courage, and aggression that all of them share (lion and boar: 5.782f=7.256f, 11.292–95, 12.41f; lion, boar, and leopard: 17.20–23; wolf, leopard, and jackal: 13.103). As wolves hunt in packs, they alone prompt similes for large groups of warriors (4.471f; 13.101–06; 16.156–66, 352–57), just as a pack of jackals (ῥῶες) is contrasted with a solitary lion (11.473–84). Otherwise, however, Homeric wolves are described in terms of the same qualities as the other predatory beasts. Elsewhere in Greek lore the wolf can function as a symbol of the alienation of a young hero from society in something like a rite of passage into manhood, but I can find no sign of this association in the Homeric similes. On wolf and outlaw see most recently C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Reading' *Greek Culture* (Oxford 1991) 244–84, on the story of Lycophron at Herodotus 3.50–53; also J. Bremmer, "Heroes, Rituals and the Trojan War," *StStorRelig* 2 (1978) 5–38.

centre of each.<sup>6</sup> Still very useful is G. P. Shipp's classification (*supra* n.2) into three types of simile: simple or undeveloped images, those that are an extended parallel to the scene in the narrative, and those that are extended independently or in contrast to it. As different beast-similes can easily be found that belong to all three types, however, it will be better to begin by treating every simile alike as an organic growth that can develop in varying directions from a more basic association of ideas.<sup>7</sup> Whether the simile is a long and detailed scene or a single glancing comparison such as λέων ὥς, the primary subject of this study should not be the mechanics of the comparison but the symbolic or aesthetic consonance that causes this particular image to be drawn in at this moment in the path of the story.

From this angle we can begin by assigning beast-similes to one of two distinct varieties of Homeric simile-making. At one extreme lie similes that emerge from their contexts in unique and unexpected ways, setting the scene of the narrative in sharp relief: as when a warrior jumping between the prows of ships is compared to an acrobat leaping from horse to horse (15.679–86), or blood dripping from a wound is compared to purple dye when a woman stains a piece of ivory (4.141–47), or a god demolishes a stockade like a child knocking down a sandcastle (15.361–66). The effect—what we might call the virtuosity—lies in the slenderness of the link between the simile image and the thing to which it is compared, which deepens the contrast between the world of the narrative and that of familiar or non-heroic life.<sup>8</sup> Quite different, and requiring a different kind of reading, are groups of similes that repeat similar images under different forms, ringing the changes on a single abiding association of ideas. The effect is most obvious when a long stretch of the narrative is punctuated by a succession of thematically linked similes: here, as C. Moulton has shown,<sup>9</sup> the cumulative effect can be to draw together the depictions in narrative and similes in a way that transcends the formal points of

<sup>6</sup> The most supple of the early approaches is that of Fränkel 4 and *passim*, contenting himself with the distinction between *Wiestück* and *Sostück*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fränkel 106; Scott 7.

<sup>8</sup> See D. H. Porter, "Violent Juxtaposition in the Similes of the *Iliad*," *CJ* 68 (1972) 11–21; Moulton esp. 51, 86f; for a comparative approach to this aspect of the poetics of simile-making, see S. Wofford, *The Choice of Achilles* (Palo Alto 1992) Ch. 1.

<sup>9</sup> See esp. 18–49, making the point that "the simile itself assumes the function of *auxesis*" (32, of 2.479).

comparison in their individual images.<sup>10</sup> When we move to a broader level of analysis, it is worth asking whether a still deeper and more traditional association of ideas may be expressed when a system of kindred similes is scattered across the entire epic. On this level what we face is not simply an example of Homer's art but part of the overall view of man and the world that informs his storytelling. On the strength of their numbers alone, the beast-similes make an excellent candidate for such a system: so many are they, and so varied in the links that they forge, that their combined effect may be not only to amplify the narrative but even to assimilate aspects of the appearance and personality of the warrior to those of the animal.<sup>11</sup>

Let me cite one example to illustrate the implications of this distinction between an isolated simile and one that belongs in a system. Three times during the battle over the dead Patroclus an Achaean warrior is compared to an animal: first Menelaus stands over him like a cow protecting her calf (17.3-6), later the same hero is like a lion standing over a cow that it has killed (17.61-69), and again Ajax defends the corpse like a lioness guarding her cubs (17.132-37). The first is one of those that work by deft comparison and overall contrast: there is an exact parallel between the two examples of protection of the powerless by the strong, but Menelaus is diametrically different from a cow in every other way. In the latter two examples, however, the potential for meaning runs far deeper, because the image of the lion can resonate with countless other beast-similes articulated in other contexts. It may be helpful to express the contrast in the vocabulary that has been applied in Silk's study of associative imagery.<sup>12</sup> Silk distinguishes the image in the narrative (the *tenor*) from the extraneous image in the simile (the *vehicle*), relating both to the *neutral ground* of shared meaning uniting them. When Homer strikingly and unexpectedly compares Menelaus to a cow, the neutral ground

<sup>10</sup> For sequences of lion-similes studied in this light see Moulton 76-86, 96-99; Lonsdale 49-70; Schnapp-Gourbeillon (*supra* n.4) 95-131; cf. Scott 56f.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. W. Schadewaldt, *Von Homers Welt und Werk*<sup>2</sup> (Stuttgart 1951) 144-51; B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind* (Oxford 1948) 202: "The animals in Homer are not only symbols, but the particular embodiments of universal vital forces." For a working-out of the same hunch (as it seems to be) in structuralist terms see Schnapp-Gourbeillon (*supra* n.4) 1-27.

<sup>12</sup> M. Silk, *Interaction in Poetic Imagery* (Cambridge 1974) 3-26, adopting the terms of I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford 1936).

is narrowed down to the ideas of helplessness and protection, and the effect is perhaps nothing more than a startling moment of vivid focalisation; but every time the image of a lion is deployed, the neutral ground is not merely the ostensible point of comparison but the full range of potential points of contact between the images of beast and warrior. In effect, the context from which the simile takes its meaning is not only its immediate environment in the poem, but the whole field of association between lions and men throughout the *Iliad*—or, indeed, in the wider tradition of martial epic that lies behind it.

By the same token, such a simile must be read in a different way from one appearing in a story where the themes of the battlefield do not belong—as in the *Odyssey*, for example, when Odysseus is startlingly compared to a hungry lion when he emerges naked to confront Nausicaa (*Od.* 6.130–36). There the juxtaposition of man and beast seems to have a dislocating or even comic effect.<sup>13</sup> In the *Iliad*, on the contrary, as different realisations of the same comparison can be seen as assimilated into a single system, they can be taken together as expressing a fundamental correspondence between the identities of warriors and beasts. This means that we should ask not only how they arise from the narrative but also how they reflect back upon it and deepen its significance in ways that cannot be done in the plainer language of straightforward description. Our approach, then, will be to regard these similes not as isolated creations but as instances of a single item, or group of items, in Homer's symbolic repertoire.

Before going any further, however, it must be said that there is a danger in treating a set of related images as a co-ordinated whole. To take a famous example, Whitman<sup>14</sup> showed that throughout the *Iliad* war and the warrior are associated with fire on many different levels of figured language and narrative, of which similes are only the most explicit. Warriors struggle like blazing fire, δέμας πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο (11.596=13.673=18.1; similarly 17.366); a hero in full career is compared to a forest fire (11.155–59); Hector surges into the fray like a flame, φλογὶ

<sup>13</sup> Compare the even more startling simile where Penelope, turning in thought from one desperate prospect to another, is compared to a lion looking for a way to escape from a massed party of hunters (*Od.* 4.787–94); see further W. T. Magrath, "The Progression of the Lion-Simile in the *Odyssey*," *CJ* 77 (1981–82) 205–12.

<sup>14</sup> C. WHITMAN, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1958: hereafter 'Whitman') 128–53.

εἵκελος Ἡφαίστοιο (17.88); a tongue of flame rises from Achilles' head when he stands on the trench defying the Trojans (18.205–14); it is a sign of dangerous fury when eyes or even armour flash like fire (e.g. 1.104, 19.16f)); and in an extended simile describing Hector in battle, raging fire and the presence of Ares are still more closely linked (15.605–08):

μαίνεται δ' ὥς ὅτ' Ἄρης ἐγγέσπαλος ἢ ὅλοον πῦρ  
οὔρεσι μαίνεται, βαθέης ἐν τάρφεσιν ὕλης,  
ἀφλοισμὸς δὲ περὶ στόμα γίγνεται, τῷ δέ οἱ ὅσσε  
λαμπέσθην βλοσυρήσιν ὑπ' ὀφρύσιν....<sup>15</sup>

Clearly it makes good sense to stress the single association of ideas that underlies these scattered examples, and to use it as part of an analysis of what both war and fire mean in the poetic landscape;<sup>16</sup> but at the same time the analysis can become vague or whimsical if it is pushed too far.<sup>17</sup> It is not hard to find images relating to fire that do not seem to partake of this connexion at all—as, for example, when Rumour personified is said to “burn” (“Ὅσσα δεδήει, 2.93);<sup>18</sup> and by the same token it is not guaranteed that all the warlike associations of fire must be present in the same way every time that the two are associated explicitly.

In short, there is no universal meaning in the symbol, no simple equation between Homeric war and Homeric fire, and we would go astray if we read one or other mention of fire in the light of other passages with which it has no real link. Nonetheless it remains clear that some symbolic unity does underlie the first set of passages we cited, and that we can gain a real insight into this unity by comparing its scattered manifestations. The lesson is that what we have seen is not part of a fixed vocabulary of signs with accepted and unambiguous values: instead, it is a potential association whose every manifestation makes sense only on its own terms, by suggestion and not by statement. The symbol cannot be defined in straight-

<sup>15</sup> “He raged, like when spear-brandishing Ares or destroying fire rages in the hills, in the glades of a deep wood, and froth appeared around his mouth, and his eyes blazed under his shaggy eyebrows.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. M. N. Nagler's highly abstract theory of the “preverbal Gestalt” in his *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer* (Berkeley 1974) 64–130; W. G. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (Baltimore 1984) esp. 75ff, 113–56.

<sup>17</sup> This danger is suggested by Whitman 153; see also Silk (*supra* n.12) 63–70.

<sup>18</sup> Cited by Whitman (336 n.4) as a problematic exception.

forward terms, and in our own analysis a meaning that is discernible in one passage must not be forced willy-nilly onto others: so that in the present discussion the cumulative effect of the system of beast-similes must be balanced against the organic independence of every member of it. This means that the best way to proceed will be to pinpoint our investigation on a single simile by trying to evoke its full depth of meaning in the light of others in the system. After doing this we will finally be able to explore how the symbolism deployed in that simile plays a vital part in Homer's portrayal of a single character, namely Achilles.

### Achilles' Rhetorical Simile: "Between Lions and Men"

The simile on which we will rest our argument is one that Achilles himself expresses at a high point in the episode of his final duel with Hector. The narrative has hitherto been especially rich in similes of birds and beasts, crystallising images both of Achilles' glamour and his lust for vengeance, but at this point it is not in the narrative proper but in the hero's words that the beasts appear. Hector, turning at least to face his foe, has asked for an agreement that the victor in the combat will give back the body of the slain to his family for burial. Such an arrangement is elsewhere (7.76–91) treated as customary before single combat, but Achilles now refuses (22.261–66):

Ἔκτορ, μή μοι, ἄλαστε, συνημοσύνας ἀγόρευε·  
ὥς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὄρκια πιστά,  
οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονά θυμὸν ἔχουσιν,  
ἀλλὰ κακὰ φρονέουσι διαμπερὲς ἀλλήλοισιν,  
ὥς οὐκ ἔστ' ἐμὲ καὶ σε φιλήμεναι, οὐδέ τι νῶϊν  
ὄρκια ἔσσονται....<sup>19</sup>

Achilles equates his implacable hostility towards Hector with two paradigms of enmity that immediately recall beast-similes of the kind seen throughout the *Iliad*. Here in the hero's high rhetoric the parallel is extended almost to the level of a parable, and its emphatic and negative structure is peculiar: where a similar comparison in the narrative might serve only to

<sup>19</sup> "Hector, you wretch, do not speak to me of compacts: just as there are no oaths to be trusted between lions and men, nor do wolves and sheep have like-thinking minds, but always have hostile intent against each other—even so there can be no friendly treatment between me and you, and we will make no oaths."

juxtapose the images of beasts and humans with each other, here Achilles pushes the association to mark out three examples of the absurd or the impossible. The anaphora with ὥς suggests that the beasts' antagonism is being brought into especially close parallel with his and Hector's situation, with an exact correspondence between the three pairs of opponents: lions and men, wolves and sheep, Achilles and Hector. This encourages us to read the simile with the view that the lion and the wolf correspond to Achilles and the man and the sheep to Hector.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, this means that the point of comparison is pinned on psychology and social mores as well as action: wolves and lions do not feel affection or make contracts in the way that normal people do, and this is the relationship in which Achilles stands to the man at this feat.

The speech can be compared with others where a warrior cuts short an idle conversation before a fight and uses a simile to express his impatience. In the heat of battle Meriones wants to borrow a spear from Idomeneus, and when the two start to brag Idomeneus breaks off impatiently, "Let us no longer stand around talking like fools" (νηπύτιοι ὥς, 13.292); similarly, during Aeneas' *aristeia* he and Achilles boast of their ancestry and prowess, and Aeneas ends in the same way, "Let us not ramble on like fools" (again νηπύτιοι, 20.244), comparing their exchange to an idle women's squabble (20.251–55) and urging that the fight begin; and Hector addresses Achilles in the same vein as they boast before their first abortive duel (20.431–37). But Achilles' image of beasts and men cuts deeper than any of these others. If he had said only (for example) that Hector was as terrified of him as a hind would be of a lion, then the implications of the simile would be less striking: the contrast between predator and prey is a standard one in speeches, where a warrior compares those he fights, or those he sees, to brave or cowardly beasts (e.g. 11.383, 13.101–06, 17.20–23). In Achilles' case, however, the refusal is made in terms of his own personality rather than the fixed codes of warrior society. His words do not merely characterize the immediate situation or the addressee: instead, they present the speaker in a startlingly new aspect.

As such the simile is peculiarly characteristic of Achilles, who of all characters in the *Iliad* is the one who deploys language in

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Eust. *Il.* 1269a: ὅρα ὥς μεγαλοφρόνως ἑαυτὸν Ἀχιλλεὺς εἰκάζει ὥς λέοντα πρὸς ἄνδρα καὶ ὥς λύκον πρὸς ἄρνα.



the most figured and creative way. He is the speaker par excellence as well as the greatest fighter (μύθων τε ῥητῆρα ... πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων, 9.443). Here, extending a traditional image to reveal something about his own personality and his attitude to human relationships, he is using rhetoric in his characteristic fashion, making heightened language the servant of heightened self-awareness and self-exposition.<sup>21</sup> As a rule other characters do not use similes about their own feelings, but Achilles does so repeatedly. In his great speech of self-pity to the Embassy, Achilles likens himself fighting and suffering for Agamemnon to a mother bird suffering in the search for titbits for her chicks (9.323–27; see Moulton 100f). As he joins in his mother's lament over his own approaching death, he cries out equally vividly against strife and against the bitter rage (χόλος) that "rises up in the breasts of men like smoke, sweeter than dripping honey" (18.107–11). Fighting Scamander he fears that he will be killed not by Hector—a death worthy of himself—nor by Paris, as his mother had foretold, but drowned like a wretched swineherd swept away by a river in spate (21.273–83). If the beast-simile belongs with this introspective group, we have added reason to expect that it may be markedly significant as an indication of Achilles' state of mind, and as such that it may be bringing out the most profound depth of meaning associated with the imagery of beasts. To understand him fully, then, we must first set his words against the full range of possible associations exhibited in beast-similes throughout the *Iliad*, returning finally to consider the place of this image in his progress from the beginning of the Wrath to the killing of Hector and its aftermath.

### The Life of Beasts and Warriors

First, we must do away with any assumption that men and beasts belong in different departments of creation, or that a resemblance between the two must be vague and superficial. The association between them begins with physical appearance: in particular the demeanour of the warrior recalls that of the beast, as for example Ajax "gazing like a beast" (παπτήνας ...

<sup>21</sup> R. P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes* (Ithaca 1989) 146–230, esp. 225ff; J. Griffin, "Homeric Words and Speakers," *JHS* 106 (1986) 50–57; P. Friedrich and J. Redfield, "Speech as a Personality Symbol: The Case of Achilles," *Language* 54 (1978) 263–88, esp. 277ff.

θηρὶ ἐοικώς, 11.546–57), as he proudly withdraws from the fray, and the lion's eyes are blazing (γλαυκιδίων, 20.172), like those of a fell warrior. Menelaus looks or turns in different directions like a lion (ἐντροπαλιζόμενος ὥς τε λῆς ἡϋγένειος, 17.109). But for our purposes it is more significant that Homer's beasts have the same emotional and cognitive apparatus as men.<sup>22</sup> The beasts have κραδίη, ἦτορ, θυμός, and φρένες, and they carry on their psychological life just as men would do. The lion's heart or mind "bears itself with strength" (θυμός ἐνὶ στήθεσσι περὶ σθένει βλεμεαίνει, 17.22)<sup>23</sup> and a lion can be ordered to an act of bravery by its heart (κέλεται δέ ἐ θυμός ἀγήνωρ, 12.300). The range of emotions given to them and to animals in general is wide, however unsophisticated: courage, rejoicing, desire, fear.<sup>24</sup> The beast has a mind full of dominating force (κρατερ-όφρων, 10.184); it goes into combat thinking proud thoughts (μέγα φρονέων, 11.325, 16.824), or with dire or destructive thoughts (ὀλοόφρων, 15.630, 17.21); like the warrior it is proud or manly in spirit (ἀγήνορι θυμῶι, 24.42);<sup>25</sup> and conversely an especially formidable hero such as Heracles or Achilles has a lion's heart (θυμολέοντα, 5.639, 7.228).

The implication is that for Homer the mental and emotional state of the fighting animal can be assimilated to that of the fighting man more closely than would ever be possible in a culture like our own. A particularly revealing simile describes Menelaus' lust for battle before his duel with Paris (3.23–28):

ὥς τε λέων ἐχάρη μεγάλῳ ἐπὶ σώματι κύρσας,  
εὐρών ἢ ἔλαφον κεράδον ἢ ἄγριον αἶγα  
πεινάων· μάλα γάρ τε κατεσθίει, εἴ περ ἂν αὐτὸν

<sup>22</sup> For full lists see Lonsdale 33–38, 42–46, and the tables at 133ff; also H. Rahn, "Das Tier in der homerischen Dichtung," *Studium Generale* 20 (1967) 97–105.

<sup>23</sup> βλεμεαίνω must be translated vaguely, as here, because neither context nor etymology allows us to pin down its meaning. What matters in the present discussion is that the verb is used exclusively of beasts (see also 12.42, 17.135) and of warriors in battle (8.337, 9.237; extended to Hephaestus engaging in the fray, 20.36).

<sup>24</sup> For negative emotions as the pivot of beast-similes note esp. Ajax withdrawing from battle, "grieving in heart" (τετιημένος ἦτορ) like a lion with τετιηότι θυμῶι (11.555f); similarly Menelaus withdraws from Patroclus' corpse like a lion whose "heart coagulates as frost" (ἦτορ παχνοῦται, 17.109–13; cf. Hes. *Op.* 360); and Antilochus fears (τρέσει) like a predatory animal driven away from a farmstead (15.585–90).

<sup>25</sup> On the meaning of ἀγήνωρ see n.43 *infra*.

σεύωνται ταχέες τε κύνες θαλεροί τ' αἰζηοί·  
ὥς ἐχάρη Μενέλαος Ἀλεξανδρον θεοειδέα  
ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδών....<sup>26</sup>

Here the innermost similarity between man and beast is the emotion named by χαίρομαι, and hence it amounts to what Homer calls χάρμη,<sup>27</sup> the exultation of the rush to combat or of battle. In this way the lion stands for the warrior's most violent and warlike mood—in other words, for his state of mind when he behaves in the way that defines him as a hero.

This leads us to another, more subtle aspect of the link between beasts and warriors. This is the quality of ἀλκή, fearlessness coupled with physical strength, which is the kernel of battle-virtue. It is ἀλκή that makes one a true man, as in the repeated exhortation to hard-pressed comrades: ἀνέρες ἔστε, φίλοι, μνήσασθε δὲ θούριδος ἀλκῆς.<sup>28</sup> In the same way it is the source of the beast's relentless aggression: so that when a fighter is compared to a beast the turning-point can be that each is ἀλκι πεποιθώς ("trusting in valour": see 5.299, 13.471, 17.61, 17.728).<sup>29</sup> Crucially, ἀλκή is the quality that makes man or beast willing to risk death in battle. For example, when Agenor's heart, his ἦτορ ἄλκιμον (21.571f), prompts him to pit himself against Achilles in defiance of the odds, his state of mind is likened to that of a leopard confronting an armed huntsman (21.576–80):

εἴ περ γὰρ φθάμενός μιν ἦ οὐτάσῃ ἡὲ βάληισιν,  
ἀλλὰ τε καὶ περὶ δουρὶ πεπαρμένη οὐκ ἀπολήγει  
ἀλκῆς, πρίν γ' ἡὲ ξυμβλήμεναι ἡὲ δαμῆναι·

<sup>26</sup> "As when a lion rejoices after coming upon a great carcass, when it has found a horned deer or a wild goat, and it is ravenous; and the lion devours it greatly even if nimble dogs and flourishing young men try to drive it off: so Menelaus rejoiced when with his eyes he saw godlike Paris."

<sup>27</sup> Note also the fighting lion who attacks with χάρμη (16.823) in a simile describing Hector as he attacks Patroclus; compare a description of warriors rejoicing in high fury (13.82): χάρμη γηθόσυνοι, τὴν σφιν θεὸς ἔμβαλε θυμῷ. It does not affect our discussion that the noun can also refer to the event of battle rather than to a psychological state. On χάρμη see J. Latacz, *Zum Wortfeld 'Freude' in der Sprache Homers* (Heidelberg 1966) 30–38.

<sup>28</sup> "Be men, my friends, and call to mind your surging valour": 6.112=8.174=11.287=15.487, 734=16.270=17.185.

<sup>29</sup> Other references for the ἀλκή or ἄλκιμον ἦτορ of beasts: 4.253; 16.157, 753; 17.111, 281; 20.169.

ὥς Ἀντήνορος υἱὸς ἀγαυοῦ δῖος Ἀγήνωρ,  
οὐκ ἔθελεν φεύγειν, πρὶν πειρήσαιτ' Ἀχιλῆος....<sup>30</sup>

Man and beast are alike in deciding to court death in the exercise of valour. In the same way, when Sarpedon's θυμός orders him to advance across the stockade in peril of his life, he is compared to a lion whose θυμός orders it to risk death in quest of food in the sheepfolds (12.299–308). Here it is especially significant that he explains his act on the grounds that there is no escape from death, so that it must be better to seek glory than to shrink from the fray (12.322–28). The beast-simile becomes a symbol of the psychological trait on which the tragedy of the *Iliad* hinges: the heroic temperament and the pursuit of glory lead inevitably towards death. From here our argument can begin to take a more definite shape: and we must explore this theme further before we can pin down the form it takes in the rhetorical simile with which we began, where Achilles dares to identify his own state with that of a lion or a wolf.

Underlying ἀλκή is μένος, the force of personality that makes the hero fight in defiance of the odds.<sup>31</sup> It is the source of his virtue, but it is also dangerous, and this inherent ambiguity is a deep-seated theme in the epic.<sup>32</sup> μένος can drive the warrior to such an extreme of passion that it shades into μανία, uncontrolled frenzy:<sup>33</sup> the etymological closeness between the

<sup>30</sup> "Even if the huntsman is first to strike or thrust at the leopard, although it be transfixed by a spear it does not abandon its valour, before it either joins combat with him or is overcome itself: just so wonderful Antenor's son, bright Agenor, refused to flee before pitting himself against Achilles." On this simile see Lonsdale 36ff.

<sup>31</sup> In what follows I assume that the meaning of the verb μέμονα, with the participle μεμαώς, is co-ordinated with that of the noun μένος.

<sup>32</sup> On the antiquity of μένος as defining a theme in the prehistory of Greek epic, see R. Schmitt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden 1967) 103–22, with extensive Vedic parallels.

<sup>33</sup> μαινόμεαι is built on the zero-grade of the root \*men-, as \*mn-i-o/e > μαιν-: see P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris 1960–80) s.v.; H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg 1960–70) s.v. Semantically, the crux is that cognates in other languages refer simply to thought in the broadest sense (e.g. Latin *mens*), but in Homeric Greek the family represented by μένος, μέμονα, and μαινόμεαι clusters around aggressive or furious mental activity in different degrees.

It could be argued, of course, that the etymological link between μένος and μαινόμεαι is irrelevant to the Homeric realities. The best answer to this is that Helenus the prophet acknowledges the connexion in meaning explicitly when

two words underlies a thematic connexion that reappears in the disasters that face those who push their battle-fury too far—notably Diomedes, Patroclus, and Hector, as well as Achilles.<sup>34</sup> In this context it is especially ominous that the beast is an eater of raw flesh, ὠμοφάγος, something that civilised Homeric man must not be.<sup>35</sup> At the beginning of the Doloneia, an episode where Diomedes and Odysseus will behave with unusual brutality, there is a strange simile in which the blood-thirsty savagery of lions spills over into the narrative scene (10.297f):

βάν ῥ' ἴμεν ὥς τε λέοντε δύω διὰ νύκτα μέλαιναν  
ἄμ φόνον, ἄν νέκυας, διὰ τ' ἔντεα καὶ μέλαν αἶμα.<sup>36</sup>

Pursuing this image, is there something bestial or inhuman about a slaughtering warrior whose hands and feet are bloody as a lion, αἱματόεις ὥς τις τε λέων (17.541f)? Simply to assert that might be to go beyond what Homer actually says. Evidence in a broadly similar direction, however, can be adduced from another passage, where a lion-simile is deployed negatively to symbolise overweening arrogance. Like Achilles' simile, it appears in the rhetoric of an emphatic speech. In the battle over the dead Patroclus, the young Euphorbus orders Menelaus to fall back before him, and the older man mocks this rash insolence:

Ζεῦ πάτερ, οὐ μὲν καλὸν ὑπέρβιον εὐχετάσθαι·  
οὔτ' οὖν παρδάλιος τόσσον μένος οὔτε λέοντος

he describes Diomedes' dangerous extreme of passion in his onslaught on the Trojans:

... ἀλλ' ὅδε λίην  
μαίνεται, οὐδέ τις οἱ δύναται μένος ἰσοφαρίζειν

(6.100f, cited by Chantraine s.v.)

<sup>34</sup> This is not the place to discuss the fascinating possibility that μῆνις, the name of the vengeful anger at the centre of the *Iliad*, may belong both thematically and etymologically to the μένος family. See most recently L. C. Muellner, "Étymologie et sémantique de ΜΗΝΙΣ," in F. Létoublon, ed., *La langue et les textes en Grèce ancien* (Paris 1992) 122–35.

<sup>35</sup> See 5.782, 7.256, 11.479, 15.592, 16.156f; similarly in the *Odyssey* Polyphemus is like a lion when he devours Odysseus' men (9.292f).

<sup>36</sup> "They stepped out to go like a pair of lions through the black night, through the slaughter, through the corpses, through the weaponry and black blood."

οὔτε σὺδ' κάπρου ὀλοόφρονος, οὔ τε μέγιστος  
 θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι περὶ σθένει βλεμμαίνει,  
 ὅσπον Πάνθου υἱὲς εὐμμελῖαι φρονέουσιν.<sup>37</sup>

Menelaus suggests that there is something sinister or even hubristic in being like a lion or a boar: the beasts are symbols of the excess of μένος that characterises the young and the reckless. Here we can begin to isolate the essential ambiguity of the wild animal's personality: he has the strength and power that characterise the hero, but he lacks the circumspection and restraint that should make a mortal man aware of his limitations.

This suggests that wide thematic resonances may be brought into play in all the many places where we find a beast-simile applied to a warrior who has taken on extraordinary μένος.<sup>38</sup> Where this marks a change in his mood that will eventually lead to folly, it must be worth asking whether the image of the lion, boar, or wolf indicates that he is imperilling himself through excessive violence. For example, a strikingly extended lion-simile marks the moment when Athene gives Diomedes the rush of supernatural μένος (5.121–32) that will eventually lead him to overstep the mark by pitting himself against the gods, and the fury itself is the pivot (5.136–43):

δὴ τότε μιν τρις τόσσον ἔλεν μένος, ὥς τε λέοντα,  
 ὃν ῥά τε ποιμὴν ἀγρῶι ἐπ' εἰροπόκοις οἴεσσι  
 χραύσῃ μὲν τ' αὐλῆς ὑπεράλμενον οὐδὲ δαμάσσει ...  
 ὥς μεμῶς Τρώεσσι μίγῃ κρατερὸς Διομήδης.<sup>39</sup>

Here, however, we face the problem of the inherent ambiguity of symbols that we touched on earlier: nothing in the way this simile is expressed suggests that the lion-like quality of his μένος is precisely what will lead to the excessive aggression of his assault on Aphrodite and Ares. Similarly Agamemnon's *aristeia* in Book 11 is an episode full of unusually extreme violence, but among the five lion-similes that punctuate it (11.113–21, 129f,

<sup>37</sup> "Father Zeus, it is disgraceful to boast excessively. Not even the leopard or the lion or the dire-minded boar, whose heart in its breast bears itself with most strength of all—not even they have as much fury as is in the minds of the sons of Panthus with their fine ash spears."

<sup>38</sup> See 5.136–43, 161–64; 5.299–302; 10.482–88; 13.198–202; 15.275–78 (with 262), 592–95, 630–36 (with 603–10; see n.54 *infra*); 18.161–64 with 155f.

<sup>39</sup> "Then three times as much fury seized him: like a lion which a shepherd attacks in the field among the woolly-fleeced sheep, after it has leapt over the enclosing wall, but he cannot overcome it ... with just such fury did conquering Diomedes surge among the Trojans."

172–78, 238ff, 292–95) there is only one (11.238ff) that mentions the beast's μένος at all, and nothing in the similes or the narrative proper suggests hubris or inhumanity in the king's demeanour. In themselves, these examples allow us only to infer that the image of the beast encapsulates the same ambiguity as does the word μένος, ranging from heroic violence to something we can almost call madness.

There are two crucial similes, however, which identify the beast's mental state with the self-destructive recklessness of a warrior who has gone beyond the bounds of mortal self-restraint. The first comes at the climactic moment when Hector is about to break through the Achaean stockade and lead his men to burn the ships.<sup>40</sup> He is in full career, fighting like a storm (ἐμάρνατο ἴσος ἀέλλῃ, 12.40), as he urges his horses across and bids his men follow (12.41–46):

ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἂν ἔν τε κύνεσσι καὶ ἀνδράσι θηρευτῆσι  
 κάρπιος ἢ λέων στρέφεται σθένει βλεμμαίνων·  
 οἱ δέ τε πυργηδὸν σφέας αὐτοὺς ἀρτύναντες  
 ἀντίον ἴστανται καὶ ἀκοντίζουσι θαμειᾶς  
 αἰχμᾶς ἐκ χειρῶν· τοῦ δ' οὐ ποτε κυδάλιμον κῆρ  
 ταρβεῖ οὐδὲ φοβεῖται, ἀγνηορίῃ δέ μιν ἔκτα...<sup>41</sup>

The crossing of the trench will eventually lead to Patroclus' foray to drive the Trojans back, and his death will make it inevitable that Hector will be killed in turn by Achilles. Later, after he has crossed the trench, Hector glories in his brief success without realising that according to Zeus' plan he will eventually be discomfited: Zeus gives him his hour of glory because he is short-lived (μινυυθάδιος) and Athene is already preparing his destruction (15.605–14). In this light the moment of the crossing can be seen as the fatal mistake that brings about Hector's ruin.<sup>42</sup> The narrative moment and the image in the simile mirror each other exactly, both physically and psychologically. Hector goes up and down the Trojan ranks, just as the beast moves up and down along the press of men; they are

<sup>40</sup> Note the perceptive reading of this simile by Moulton 47 n.54.

<sup>41</sup> "Like when a boar or a lion turns back and forth in the midst of hounds and huntsmen, bearing itself with strength, and they stand against it in wall-like array, supporting each other; and they thrust out thronging spears from their hands; and its glorious heart does not fear or feel terror, and its own heroism kills it...."

<sup>42</sup> See J. M. REDFIELD, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Chicago 1975: hereafter 'Redfield') 143–53.

terrified by his mood; and Hector is being led into mortal danger by his overweening confidence, just as the boar or lion's fury will destroy it when it hurls itself at the armed huntsmen. The key words linking the two scenes are ἀγηνορίη δέ μιν ἔκτα : it is because the beast is excessively proud or heroic (ἀγῆνωρ) that its ferocity will lead to its death.<sup>43</sup> The psychological point, and even the form of words that expresses it, correspond exactly to Andromache's earlier warning to her husband at their parting: δαιμόνιε, φθίσει σε τὸ σὸν μένος (6.407: "your own fury will destroy you").

A parallel simile appears when Patroclus' success against the Trojans has brought him into similar folly, so that he has forgotten Achilles' warning that he must not push the fight too far or try to storm Troy alone, lest he usurp the other's glory or arouse divine anger (16.87–96). He has now killed Hector's charioteer, with overweening taunts, and he is about to face Hector over the corpse (16.751–54):

ὥς εἰπὼν ἐπὶ Κεβριόνῃ ἥρωϊ βεβήκει  
οἶμα λέοντος ἔχων, ὅς τε σταθμοὺς κεραΐζων  
ἔβλητο πρὸς στήθος, ἐὴ δέ μιν ὤλεσεν ἀλκή,  
ὥς ἐπὶ Κεβριόνῃ, Πατρόκλεες, ἄλσο μεμαῶς.<sup>44</sup>

Patroclus' valour has led him to face an enemy beyond the measure of his strength, just as the courage that makes the lion brave enough to risk death is here what brings about his ruin (ἐὴ δέ μιν ὤλεσεν ἀλκή). The fatal flaw in beast or hero is that his defining strength, passion, and courage is something that threatens to destroy him. In short, these similes sum up the link between glory and death.

<sup>43</sup> Whatever the original etymological basis of ἀγῆνωρ, in Homeric usage it seems to be treated as if it were the intensive ἀγα- prefixed to the stem seen in ἡνωρέη ("manhood" or "manly courage"): see Chantraine (*supra* n.33) *s.v.*). Literally, then, to be ἀγῆνωρ is to abound in that quality, potentially to the point of excess. This is well illustrated when Diomedes expresses the idea that Achilles' pride and anger are implacable: he is "especially ἀνῆνωρ" and has been now "driven to greater ἀγηνορίη" (9.699f).

<sup>44</sup> "So saying he stepped over the warrior Cebriones, with the bearing of a lion, which has been wounded in the breast while ravaging the farmsteads, and its own valour destroys it: so, Patroclus, did you leap onto Cebriones in fury."



## Achilles' Fury and Self-Destruction

With this in mind we return to our starting-point, the simile where Achilles equates himself with a lion or a wolf, implacably cut off from Hector as the beast is cut off from men or sheep. By now it will be clear that in this image Achilles is associating himself not merely with strength and courage but also with a state of extreme mental ferocity that implies a tendency towards self-destruction. So far we have seen this theme either suggested or made explicit in the poet's voice or in the way Homer's characters describe each other: what makes Achilles' simile uniquely ominous is that he is describing *himself* through an image with such dark associations. In effect he is glorying in an extreme of heroism—*μένος, ἀλκή, ἀγνηορίη*—that approaches the suicidal. A patriotic hero might accept death as the necessary price of saving his country—"it is no shame for him to die defending his country, for his wife and children are saved, and his home and farm unharmed," as Hector declares (15.497ff)—but Achilles embraces death in his lion-like mood with no object beyond the sating of his own passion. To understand the full significance of this, we must see it as part of the inner transformation that he has undergone in the course of the Wrath,<sup>45</sup> as he moves towards the inexorable prospect of his own death.<sup>46</sup>

In the course of the Wrath Achilles has become ever more deeply isolated. In the quarrel with Agamemnon we saw him in pride and anger; in his speeches to the Embassy we saw this mood developed into pity for himself and his mortal soul, *ψυχή* (9.321f, 408f); now with the death of Patroclus his pride demands that Hector should die and his fate, equally, demands that his own death will follow, as his mother reveals to him: *αὐτίκα γάρ τοι ἔπειτα μεθ' Ἑκτορα πότμος ἐτοῖμος* (18.96: "Death is ready for you, immediately after Hector"). In the

<sup>45</sup> This is not the place to enlarge on the problems of the "*hamartia* of Achilles" and his supposed "purification" in the later books: see esp. O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings* (Oxford 1990) 194–201; Redfield 203–23; C. Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad* (= *Mnemosyne Suppl.* 17 [Leiden 1971]) 9–17; Whitman 181–220.

<sup>46</sup> The clearest synoptic statement of the early part of this causal chain is by Zeus to Hera, 15.53–77, echoed in the poet's voice at 15.592–614. On the prophecies that punctuate it see M. W. Edwards in *The Iliad: A Commentary* V (Cambridge 1991) ad 17.404–11 and 18.85f, with further references. On the general theme of heroes facing their own deaths see R. Renehan, "The *Heldentod* in Homer: One Heroic Ideal," *CP* 82 (1987) 99–116.

earlier episodes Achilles had already known that he would die at Troy,<sup>47</sup> but only since the death of Patroclus has he seen the inevitable link between the three deaths;<sup>48</sup> so it is that in mourning Patroclus he laments his own end,<sup>49</sup> and in seeking Hector's death he also hastens his own.<sup>50</sup> Not only is he brave enough to suffer death, he accepts it gladly in return for the satisfaction of his own anger: αὐτίκα τεθναίην, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄρ' ἔμελλον ἐταίρωι/ κτεινομένωι ἐπαμῦναι (18.98f: "Let me die at once, since I could not defend my friend when he was killed"). This embracing of death is the key to his alienation from human society throughout his onslaught on the Trojans. He makes this link himself when Lycaon begs to be ransomed: he refuses to spare him not merely as part of his vengeance for Patroclus but also because his own approaching end makes life meaningless (21.106–13):

ἀλλά, φίλος, θάνε καὶ σύ· τίη ὀλοφύρεαι οὕτως;  
κάτθανε καὶ Πάτροκλος, ὃ περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων.  
οὐκ ὀράαις οἶος καὶ ἐγὼ καλὸς τε μέγας τε;  
πατὴρ δ' εἴμ' ἀγαθοῖο, θεὰ δέ με γείνατο μήτηρ,  
ἀλλ' ἐπι τοι καὶ ἐμοὶ θανάτος καὶ μοῖρα κραταίη.  
ἔσσεται ἢ ἡὼς ἢ δαίμων ἢ μέσον ἡμᾶρ,  
ὅπποτε τις καὶ ἐμεῖο Ἄρηι ἐκ θυμὸν ἔλθῃται,  
ἢ ὅ γε δουρὶ βαλὼν ἢ ἀπὸ νευρῆφιν οὔσῳ.<sup>51</sup>

It is this certain prospect of death that makes Achilles wild (μάλ' ἔμμεμαώς, 20.468) and cuts him off from the kind of men that make truces and civilised pacts. His present μένος is bound

<sup>47</sup> μινυνθάδιος is the key word: 1.352 (Achilles to Thetis), 414–18 (Thetis to Achilles). On this theme and Achilles' choice of a glorious life and an early death see esp. Schadewaldt (*supra* n.11) 234–67.

<sup>48</sup> Homer is ambiguous on the prediction of Patroclus' death: cf. 16.50–54, 249f; 17.401–11; and 19.328–33, where Achilles implies he had no knowledge of Patroclus' coming disaster, with 18.8–14, where he says that Thetis had told him that "the best of the Myrmidons" would die before him.

<sup>49</sup> 19.315–37; cf. Thetis' lamentation in anticipation of his death (18.54–64) with 18.440f.

<sup>50</sup> Dialogue of Thetis and Achilles (18.52–137; cf. his reaction to the prophecy of the horse Xanthus (19.404–23).

<sup>51</sup> "Die, my friend, you also: why do you wail so? Patroclus also died, who was a much better man than you. Do you not see how tall and handsome I am? I am the son of a noble father, and the mother who bore me is a goddess, but death and conquering Fate stand over both you and me. There will be a dawn or an evening or a noonday, when someone will take the breath of life from me in battle, striking me with a spear or with an arrow from a bowstring."

up with the *χόλος* that caused the Wrath, and the proud isolation of his withdrawal has given place to a still more proud rejection of the restraint that tempers violence in battle.

In this way Achilles is separated from other men by the qualities that we have already seen linking heroes and beasts throughout the poem. In his rhetorical simile he expresses the darkest implications of his isolation: by counting himself among lions and wolves he announces that he is abandoning human values and human society and choosing death in preference to life. Ultimately, the image of the beast expresses the fact that those two decisions imply each other. In this way the simile plumbs the depths of the state of mind to which he has been led by the extreme of passionate heroism that characterises him: so that he explores the poetic, 'Homeric' meaning of the symbol on a level of rhetorical skill that no other character in the poem achieves.

Our simile can be further characterised as the high-point in a sequence of beast-similes punctuating Achilles' movement towards Hector's death and his own. The first of the series is especially striking because the immediate point of comparison is psychologically precise, but in a more intimate way than in any of the similes we observed earlier. Achilles begins his lament over Patroclus like a lion grieving the loss of its cubs (18.318-22):

πυκνά μάλα στενάχων ὥς τε λῖς ἡϋγένειος,  
 ὦι ῥά θ' ὑπὸ σκυῖνους ἐλαφιβόλος ἀρπάσῃ ἀνὴρ  
 ὕλης ἐκ πυκινῆς· ὁ δέ τ' ἄχνηται ὕστερος ἐλθὼν,  
 πολλὰ δέ τ' ἄγκε' ἐπῆλθε μετ' ἀνέρος ἵχνι' ἐρευνῶν,  
 εἴ ποθεν ἐξεύροι· μάλα γὰρ δριμύς χόλος αἰρεῖ.<sup>52</sup>

Here the correspondence turns on *χόλος*, the destructive emotion that turned the Wrath to disaster. When Achilles revealed himself to the Embassy, he spoke of the *χόλος* that had swollen in his breast (9.646f); when he refused to help the Achaeans in their need, his followers railed against him that his mother had reared him on *χόλος* instead of milk (16.203; cf. 16.30f); now he tells his mother that he loathes it (18.107-11), but it deepens in him as his battle-fury gathers. The mood that now holds him is bitterness transformed into violent aggres-

<sup>52</sup> "... moaning constantly like a well-maned lion, whose cubs have been snatched by a deerhunter from a dense wood: and the lion grieves as it goes behind, and it passes on through many valleys searching after the man's tracks, in the hope of discovering him, for very bitter anger holds it."

sion. The clearest sign of this ominous move comes when Thetis brings his armour, and he alone among the Myrmidons is seized not with awe but with bitterness and pleasure together: αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς/ ὡς εἶδ', ὡς μιν μᾶλλον ἔδυ χόλος, ἐν δέ οἱ ὄσσε/ δεινὸν ὑπὸ βλεφάρων ὡς εἰ σέλας ἐξεφάανθεν (19.15ff: "But when Achilles saw, still greater rage entered him, and his eyes shone out terribly under his eyebrows like a blazing fire"). The passion that now seems lion-like is what has forbidden him to "conquer his mighty spirit" (δάμασον θυμὸν μέγαν, 9.496) either in sulking or now in his final, fatal career. In this first simile of the sequence Achilles' movement towards unbridled violence is expressed through an image that links the lion to the emotion that has carried him from the beginning of the Wrath.

The prospect of the lion's self-destruction comes more explicitly to the fore in the next simile in the sequence, when Achilles' onslaught begins and he faces Aeneas. Here the co-ordinated description of appearance and emotion is finely detailed (20.164-75):

Πηλεΐδης δ' ἐτέρωθεν ἐναντίον ὦρτο λέων ὥς,  
 σίντης, ὃν τε καὶ ἄνδρες ἀποκτάμεναι μεμάασιν  
 ἀγρόμενοι πᾶς δῆμος· ὁ δὲ πρῶτον μὲν ἀτίζων  
 ἔρχεται, ἀλλ' ὅτε κέν τις ἀρηϊθίων αἰζηῶν  
 δουρὶ βάλλῃ, ἐάλη τε χανὼν, περὶ τ' ἀφρὸς ὀδόντας  
 γίνεσθαι, ἐν δέ τέ οἱ κραδίηι στένει ἄλκιμον ἦτορ,  
 οὐρῇ δὲ πλευράς τε καὶ ἰσχία ἀμφοτέρωθεν  
 μαστίεται, ἐὲ δ' αὐτὸν ἐποτρύνει μαχέσασθαι,  
 γλαυκίων δ' ἰθὺς φέρεται μένει, ἦν τινα πέφνηι  
 ἀνδρῶν, ἢ αὐτὸς φθίεται πρῶτῳ ἐν ὁμίλῳ,  
 ὥς Ἀχιλῆ' ὤτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ  
 ἄντιον ἐλθέμεναι μεγάλῃτορος Αἰνεΐαο.<sup>53</sup>

At every point the description of the lion corresponds to something in our image of the hero at his most fey and dangerous: mouth yawning to cry out, foaming jaws, blazing

<sup>53</sup> "Achilles surged against him from the other side like a lion, a marauder, whom men are rushing forward to kill, the whole community gathered together: the lion goes in first unheeding; but then one of the battle-swift youths strikes it with a spear, and its crouches gaping-jawed, and froth appears around its fangs, and its proud spirit groans in its heart, and it lashes its ribs and flanks on both sides with its tail, and urges itself on to fight, and with blazing eyes it is hurled forward by its fury, either to kill one of the men or to be destroyed itself in the front of the throng: just so did Achilles' fury and his proud heart urge him on to go against great-hearted Aeneas."

eyes.<sup>54</sup> Here the risk of self-destruction is expressed as an even balance of possibilities, as in some of the less highly-charged similes that we have examined from elsewhere, but the prospect is given still darker significance by its place in Achilles' fatal progress. The closer the thematic correspondences, the deeper the resonances of the simile will be; here, consequently, the psychological as well as visual assimilation of hero to beast is at its most evocative.

The next stage of the sequence is our rhetorical image of Achilles standing over Hector like a lion or a wolf and refusing to make pacts. At this point he is about to fulfil a decision of momentous import: not only to kill Hector but also to defile his corpse and to slaughter Trojan captives over Patroclus' body (see 18.334–37; Segal [*supra* n.45] 33–47). In the past he had been prepared to return prisoners for ransom (11.104ff, 21.34–48), and once at the very start of the Wrath we even hear him described as μεθήμων ("gentle") and without χόλος (2.241), just as when he killed Eëtion in the sack of Thebe he honoured him after death out of a sense of respect (σεβάσσατο γὰρ τό γε θημῶι, 6.417). Now, however, he refuses to curb the urge to violence, and in this sense above all his mood is ὤμός ("savage"). A little later Hector, now on his knees, renews his plea that his body be returned for burial, and Achilles replies with the same wildness as before (22.345–47):

μή με, κύον, γουνῶν γουνάζω μηδὲ τοκήων·  
αἶ γάρ πως αὐτόν με μένος καὶ θυμὸς ἀνείη  
ᾧμ' ἀποταμνόμενον κρέα ἔδμεναι, οἷα ἔοργας.<sup>55</sup>

Achilles' rhetoric expresses in human terms what he had implied in the simile of his previous speech:<sup>56</sup> he stands outside the pale of human behaviour, and he has become like the beast that batters on the flesh of its victims.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Hector's berserk fury (15.605–14), which we have already cited in a different context (*supra* 142). Lonsdale (68f) points out the close correspondence between the description of Hector in this passage and that of wild beasts in similes like the one cited here.

<sup>55</sup> "You dog, do not beg me by my knees or my parents: I wish my fury and my proud spirit would let me cut off your flesh and eat it raw, for what you have done."

<sup>56</sup> Cf. K. Stanley, *The Shield of Homer* (Princeton 1993) 217f.

<sup>57</sup> The threat to eat human flesh is voiced elsewhere by others, but in contexts where it looks like mere hyperbole: as when Zeus mocks Hera's hatred of the Trojans (4.30–36), or when Hecuba vents her impotent hatred of Achilles (24.209–16).

Inhumanity offends the gods, and when it comes to their notice we see the implications of the lion-pattern at its most dangerous. Achilles is letting the dead Hector rot, and Apollo complains to Zeus through a closely detailed simile that again equates Achilles with a marauding lion (24.39–45):

ἄλλ' ὀλοῶι Ἀχιλῆϊ, θεοί, βούλεσθ' ἐπαρήγειν,  
 ὦι οὐτ' ἄρ τε φρένες εἰσὶν ἐναίσιοιμοι οὔτε νόημα  
 γναμπτὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι, λέων δ' ὥς ἄγρια οἶδεν,  
 ὅς τ' ἐπεὶ ἄρ μεγάλην τε βίηι καὶ ἀγήνορι θυμῷ  
 εἰξας εἶσ' ἐπὶ μῆλα βροτῶν, ἵνα δαῖτα λάβηισιν,  
 ὥς Ἀχιλεὺς ἔλεον μὲν ἀπώλεσεν, οὐδὲ οἱ αἰδῶς  
 γίγνεται.<sup>58</sup>

Both man and beast are savage, they yield to their swelling passion and reject αἰδῶς, the law of communal restraint. "Yielding to the θυμός," as the lion does here, is exactly what Phoenix warned Achilles against in vain (9.597–601). Similarly, it was because of his proud spirit (ἀγήνορι) that Achilles refused to accept Agamemnon's offer from the Embassy (see 9.699f), just as now he is behaving like a lion whose θυμός ἀγήνωρ turns him away from pity. According to Apollo his savagery brings defilement on him: κωφὴν γὰρ δὴ γαῖαν ἀεικίζει μενεαίνων (24.54: "In his fury he is doing outrage to dumb earth"). By mistreating one who cannot defend himself, Achilles has defied the laws of human nature and the order of things.<sup>59</sup> This is the act of one with frenzied thoughts (φρεσὶ μαινομένηισιν, 24.135). These thoughts appear to have passed when Achilles receives Priam into his tent, but they show themselves again when Priam tries to hurry him towards handing over the body. His rage overcomes him once more, he threatens to break Zeus' command and kill the suppliant visitor, and as he does so the image of the lion flashes out again (24.568–72):

<sup>58</sup> "Gods, you are willing to help ferocious Achilles, whose mind is not held in reasonable measure, nor are his intentions held curbed in his breast: he has savagery in his thoughts, like a lion who yields to his great violence and his proud heart, and goes against the flocks of mortals to seize his prey: just so has Achilles abandoned pity, and there is no restraint in him."

<sup>59</sup> This line is difficult, as it is ambiguous whether γαῖα/Γαῖα refers to the dead Hector or the divine earth, who could be seen as guardian of the θέμις violated by Achilles. The former interpretation is strongly suggested by the use of the verb ἀεικίζει (cf. esp. 22.256, 404; 24.22); and see further C. Macleod, *Homer: Iliad Book 24* (Cambridge 1982) *ad loc.*

“... τῷ νῦν μή μοι μᾶλλον ἐν ἄλγεσι θυμὸν ὀρίνηις,  
μή σε, γέρον, οὐδ’ αὐτὸν ἐνὶ κλισίῃσιν ἐάσω  
καὶ ἱκέτην περ ἐόντα, Διὸς δ’ ἀλίτωμαι ἐφετμάς.”  
ὥς ἔφατ’, ἔδεισεν δ’ ὁ γέρων καὶ ἐπείθετο μύθῳ,  
Πηλεΐδης δ’ οἴκοιο λέων ὥς ἄλτο θύραζε.<sup>60</sup>

The two words λέων ὥς remind us, as nothing else could do so succinctly, that Achilles’ anger has been cloaked but not conquered.<sup>61</sup>

It is in the light of Apollo’s judgment that we can sum up our reading of the simile in which Achilles identifies his state of mind with that of a beast. Read through the deeper associations of the beasts in Homer’s symbolic language, to be like a lion in the most profound sense is to defy Zeus and sanity and to welcome the death that such defiance can bring. When Achilles likens himself to a lion, he is revelling not only in being a hero but in being a madman. In that extraordinary speech the symbolic vocabulary of the simile tradition enables him to express an idea that could not otherwise have been put into words without straining the resources of poetic language or making the hero himself seem grotesque.

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<sup>60</sup> “... Do not torment my heart any more in its grief, old man, lest I cease to restrain myself from you, suppliant though you are, and break Zeus’ commands’. So he spoke; and the old man feared and obeyed his words; and Achilles sprang out of the door like a lion.”

<sup>61</sup> Cf. N. Richardson’s perceptive comment on this passage: *The Iliad: A Commentary* VI (Cambridge 1993) ad 24.552–95.