

Achilles beyond Fury

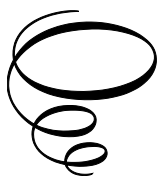
Achilles beyond Fury:

Other Faces of the Hero

Edited by

Maria Fernanda Brasete and
Carlos Morais

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CHAPTER ONE

RAGE, HUMANS, RIVERS AND FIRE: AN ECOLOGICAL READING OF HOMER'S *ILIAD* BOOK 21

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*Diuine Scamander, purpled yet with blood
Of Greekes and Trojans, which therein did die*

(Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book 4 Canto 11)

At the supernatural climax of the *Iliad*, the River Scamander, whom the gods call Xanthus, asks Achilles to stop slaying Trojans in his streams. His watercourse is now blocked and he cannot get past the corpses to flow into the sea. But Achilles is not to be halted, and the River at last, after more than two hundred lines of slaughter conducted in his shoals and eddies, brutally retaliates. He rouses all his waters and rushes against Achilles, his flood-tide now sweeping away the massed cadavers (21.214-39).

Achilles has finally met his match. He has reached the limits of his physical strength. Man can maltreat rivers for prolonged periods, but there will, inevitably, one day be a price to pay. Achilles cannot withstand the enormous wave, and becomes unsteady on his feet. So he grabs an elm tree, but in doing so uproots it. The tree falls across the river, bringing with it the soil of the bank in which it had been planted. Achilles leaps from the river and tries to escape across the plain, but he is filled with terror. The River pursues him with a mighty roar (21.240-56).

Here Homer introduces a crucial simile which encapsulates the conflicted relations between man and environment that characterise the entire world of the poem. First, and most importantly, the great River-God behaves like a stream of water whose course a gardener has tried to divert (21.258-64):

It was like when a man guides the flow of a stream of water from a murky spring,
 leading it through his plants and gardens with a mattock in his hands,
 creating dams in its course.
 As it flows along, all the pebbles underneath are swept along with it,
 and it rolls quickly onwards with a gushing sound
 and it overtakes even the man who is guiding it.
 That was how the streaming wave continuously overtook Achilles,
 despite his swiftness. For the gods are more powerful than men.¹

Man knows how to interfere in nature in order to make it serve his ends, but cannot predict the full consequences of that interference. For something—the ancients called it the gods, since natural and elemental forces are mostly presented as controlled by or semi-commensurate with anthropomorphic deities—is more powerful than men.

The river continues his pursuit, and Achilles is incapable of standing his ground against the ineluctable waves which beat from above on his shoulders and drag away the soil from beneath his feet. Achilles now appeals to Zeus. He had been promised a glorious death in combat (21.281-3),

‘But now it is fated for me to die miserably,
 cut off like a boy swineherd trapped in a great river,
 when a torrent sweeps him away as he tries to cross it in winter’.

If Scamander is like a stream that man responding with unexpected force when a man tries to control it, Achilles is like a boy utterly helpless in the face of a river. These two similes frame the sole episode in the *Iliad* where Achilles the semi-divine, godlike superman, fired by a godlike fury, *mēnis*, is about to be vanquished. They are produced by the poetic imagination of an age where humans believed that there were no limits to the provision of resources guaranteed to humans by nature.

Moreover, Book 21 of the *Iliad*, the poem representing the apogee of Achilles’ wrath and its frustration, offers us an extraordinary sequence of poetry and a unique aesthetic experience. It is as if Homer had thrown, into a kaleidoscope, coloured fragments of glass representing humans interfering with the rest of the natural world, humans being destroyed by natural disaster, the elements of fire (both wild and domestic), water (both rivers and sea) and wind, some of them represented by speaking, autonomous divine agents, and also the wild glass fragments representing gods who play with both humans and elements as they jostle for authority between

¹ This and all remaining translations of Homer are my own.

themselves. We witness cataclysmic flood and conflagration, the wholesales destruction of life—botanical and zoological as well as human—in scenes unparalleled in the rest of the poem; they offer a vision of what the world might become if Hera had harnessed wind and fire, personified as Hephaestus, Zephyros and Notos (21.331-41), to put a stop to this elemental apocalypse, merely in order to save Achilles to fight another day.

The scenes not only describe what is happening right now in this one river valley, but leave unforgettable visions of the annihilation of humanity by river, wind and fire stamped on our consciousness. And in the process these scenes use various literary means to comingle the individual elements and agents, to make it almost impossible to individuate them; Achilles rushes on like fire (21.12), but the river has silvery eddies (21.8). This in turn obscures any clear understanding of cause and effect—the full extent of human responsibility or helplessness, and the full extent of the autonomy of natural forces—their ability not only to fight back against human interference but to act entirely spontaneously.

The elemental showdown provides the climax to Achilles' day of utter rage after he hears of the death of Patroclus and is engulfed by a 'black cloud' of grief (18.22). He collapses in the dust, smearing his face with ashes and tearing his hair with both his hands (18.23-7). His lamentation and that of the slave women seized by himself and Patroclus arouse his mother Thetis, who emerges from the sea to approach him; he informs her that life means nothing to him until he has killed Hector. Thetis responds, weeping, that his own death shall follow swiftly on Hector's (18.95-6). But Achilles tells her not to attempt to dissuade him from avenging Patroclus. It is his instruction to her that prompts her to go to Hephaestus to ask him to make new armour for Achilles (18.145-7).

This extraordinary dialogue occurs the day before Achilles' incomparable, terrifyingly berserk rampage, thus setting it up as one which will lead as inevitably to his own death as to Hector's. This casts a bleak metaphysical light on all that is to ensue. This hero refuses his last chance to save himself from death at Troy, and elects to die after winning glory.

While they have been speaking, the battle over Patroclus' corpses has continued on the battlefield unabated, and Hector is about to gain control of the body. Hera sends Iris, the rainbow goddess, to urge Achilles to action, even though as yet he has no new armour. Iris tells him that he can nevertheless go and show himself to the Trojans from a distance, to implant terror into them and perhaps grant the Achaeans a breathing-space (18.165-80).

Athena protects the unarmed superhero with her aegis, a golden cloud over his head and a blindingly bright fire issuing from his body. Man and

elemental force become indivisible (18.203-6). With divine aid, Achilles is virtually turning into the element of fire itself. Here a long simile describes the visual effect of his supernaturally enhanced appearance: it was like this situation (18.207-13):

When smoke emanates from a city and reaches far to the sky,
from an island which enemies are besieging,
and they contend all day long in hateful war
from their city walls, at sunset
the beacon-fires flame up one after another, and the glare
springs up high for people who live nearby to see,
in case they can come in their ships to ward off harm.

Achilles looks exactly like what he represents, as the living instrument that will ensure that the besieged city of Troy will be placed in parlous danger of destruction.

Resembling fire, he strides to the trench and bellows; Athena joined in his shouting. Three times he bellows, stupefying the Trojans and their horses. They were thrown into confusion by the volume of Achilles' 'bronze' voice, which sounded 'as clear as a trumpet when murderous enemies are besieging a city' (18.219-20). In the chaos, twelve of their warriors died at the hands of their own fellow soldiers, from the equivalent of 'friendly fire'.² At last the body of Patroclus is retrieved by the Greeks, and Hera makes the sun go down (18.239-42). The Trojans bivouac for the night outside the city, while the Achaeans prepare Patroclus for his funeral. Meanwhile, Hephaestus forges the new arms for Achilles, including his shield.

The next day, Achilles and Agamemnon resolve their differences, but Achilles swears that he will touch neither food nor drink until he has avenged Patroclus. Zeus is concerned and sends Athena to bestow nectar and ambrosia upon him, to keep him from hunger (19.347-8). Achilles has already been turned visually into the equivalent of the element of fire itself. Now his separation from normal human experience, his temporary participation in the realm of the divine, is further emphasised by his unforgettable arming scene (19.365-74):

His teeth could be heard gnashing; both his eyes
blazed like flaming fire, and unbearable grief
sank into his heart. In his rage against the Trojans
he donned the gifts of the god that Hephaestus had laboured to forge for him.

² On which see Charles R. Shrader, 'Friendly Fire: The Inevitable Price', *Parameters: The Journal of the U.S. Army War College*, 22 (1992) 29-44.

First he put round his shins the fine greaves, fitted with silver over the ankles.
 Second, he fixed the breastplate round his chest,
 and cast the bronze sword, studded with silver,
 over his shoulders. Then he took hold of his great solid shield,
 and from it emanated a gleam like the moon.

In a second, longer and far stranger simile, the gleam coming from the shield is likened to a natural element that has been tamed by nature—a fire burning in a human residence—but which causes emotional pain to other humans who cannot tame nature (19.375-8):

It was like when the shining light of a burning fire can be seen
 from the sea by sailors, and it burns high up in the mountains
 in an isolated refuge; but the storm-winds carry them against their will
 out across the fish sea, far away from their friends.

Achilles' war equipment may be beautiful but it bodes misery. The fire men have made to help them survive has a far more sinister additional function: it illuminates all that men who have tried to tame the seas in their ships can lose if natural forces are not compliant. Achilles completes his arming scene by donning his helmet which shone like a star (19.381) and grasped his spear of Pelian ash—the foreshadowing in ancient literature of the tragic deforestation of Pelion in Thessaly, which I address in my forthcoming monograph *Achilles in Green: The Iliad, Poem of the Anthropocene*.³

The next book of the *Iliad* opens with Zeus asking Thetis to convene a divine assembly. A strange emphasis is placed on the invitation being extended not just to the Olympian gods but also specifically to all the water deities: we are told (20.7-9),

And so not one of the rivers was absent except Ocean,
 nor any of the nymphs who inhabit fair sacred groves,
 and river-sources and grassy meadows.

It is curious that Ocean was exempt. A self-maintaining, circular flow, Ocean was the last thing that Hephaestus had added to Achilles' shield, to encircle and contain inside all the other cosmic and human scenes the smith-god had painstakingly forged and crafted (18.607-8). Ocean is sometimes seen as the eldest of the Titans, but other archaic traditions grant him a primordial role in the creation of the universe, making him far more ancient than Zeus and the other Olympians. For example, when Hera had asked for

³ See also Edith Hall, 'Iliaden og det 21. århundrets apokalyptiske forestillinger', *Agora. Journal for metafysisk spekulasjon*, 39 (2022) 46-68.

Aphrodite's help in her planned seduction of Zeus in Book 14, she had invented a reason why she needed erotic help. She says she is going to visit her currently estranged foster parents Ocean, 'origin of gods' (Ὠκεανόν τε θεῶν γένεσιν, 14.201, see also 14.302). Hypnos calls Ocean 'origin of everything' or 'origin of all streams' (14.246, ὅς περ γένεσις πάντεσσι τέτυκται). Aristophanes records a tradition that the three primordial beings, brought into existence by Eros, were Ouranos, Ocean and Gaia (*Birds* 700-2). The Orphic *Hymn to Ocean* calls him 'imperishable and eternal and the 'origin of both gods and men' (83.1-2).⁴ Ocean's status relative to Zeus's must always be ambiguous.

In this council of all the immortals but Ocean, Zeus says that the gods may return to the field of battle and assist the side each favours, although they soon take their seats to watch. As battle begins, Achilles searches for Hector. He nearly kills Aeneas, but Poseidon, despite supporting the Achaeans, rescues Aphrodite's son (20.318-29).

Achilles kills several Trojans. When he kills Hector's brother, Polydorus, Hector charges against Achilles and has to be rescued by Apollo. Achilles continues slaughtering Trojans in the most savage *aristeia* in the entire *Iliad*; some of his victims are associated with rivers or divinities of the elements—Iphition, the son of a Naiad and Otrynteus, born in the lands of his ancestors by the Gygaean Lake, the River Hyllus that teems with fish, and eddying Hermus (20.381-92). The slaughterhouse narrative of book 20 concludes with two similes helping us understand the sheer force of the furious energy driving on Achilles. He is sequentially compared *both* to a force of nature destroying all in its path without the involvement of humans, *and* to a man harnessing nature to compel both animals and plants to render him a livelihood. He charges on (20.490-2),

As a god-kindled fire rages through the deep ravines
of a parched mountainside, and the deep forest burns,
and the whirling wind drives the flame on in every direction.

The horses drawing his chariot trample on corpses and shields, spattering blood everywhere, like the bulls a man yokes 'to tread white barley on a well-built threshing floor, and the husks are quickly peeled beneath the hooves of the bulls as they bellow loudly' (20.495-7). Natural disaster? Or man forcing a living from nature? In his moment of abject fury, Achilles seems indistinguishable from either.

⁴ Ὠκεανὸν καλέω, πατέρ' ἄφθιτον, αἰὲν ἔόντα, ἀθανάτων τε θεῶν γένεσιν θνητῶν τ' ἀνθρώπων,

With these similes, Achilles rages on into the next book, driving the Trojans forward, and arrives in its first line at the fair-flowing river Scamander/Xanthus, whom we are reminded is the son of Zeus himself (21.2). Half of the Trojans are forced to jump into the river, like locusts driven on by a wildfire (21.12-16). Achilles leaves his spear by a tamarisk bush and leaps in after them with only his sword. Their hideous groans can be heard as the river runs with their blood. They are like fish trying to escape an enormous dolphin (21.17-26).

Achilles' rampage pauses as he captures the twelve young Trojans he intends to sacrifice on Hector's pyre, and sends them to the ships. But then he resumes his killing spree. Details we are given concerning the last two warriors to be slain keep our focus on the twin notions of natural catastrophe and human exploitation of nature. One is Lycaon, a son of Priam whom Achilles had previously captured when the youth was cutting shoots from a wild fig-tree (a non-renewable resource) in his father's vineyard. He was going to use them to make the wicker sides of a chariot (21.34-9). Achilles had sold Lycaon into slavery, but Lycaon's release had been secured by a ransom of over three hundred cattle (21.79). Achilles kills him, and hurls him into the River, saying that the fish will lick the blood from his wound, and Scamander will carry his corpse down to the open sea where more fish will eat Lycaon's white fat (21.125-7).

We are explicitly told that this makes the River angrier (21.136-8). But he does not launch himself into open conflict with Achilles just yet. A recent arrival at Troy is Asteropaeus from Paeonia in northern Macedonia, and he is the grandson of the Northern Macedonian and Greek River Axios, now called the Vardar (21.140-3).

Asteropaeus stands forth from the River to face Achilles, and River-God puts courage in this grandson-of-a-river's heart (21.145-6). In the warriors' pre-combat altercation, Asteropaeus stresses his descent from a mighty river (21.154-60). He does not shame himself in combat, either. He is ambidextrous and is also unique in the *Iliad* in succeeding in drawing blood from Achilles when he hits his forearm (21.161-8). But Achilles of course prevails. In his boast over the corpse, he reintroduces the focus on his victim's descent from a river. That genealogy may have made Asteropaeus mighty, but Zeus is mightier than rivers, so descendants of Zeus must be mightier than descendants from rivers. Achilles includes Xanthus in his taunt, suggesting that Asteropaeus should ask him for help, but that it might not be a good idea (21.184-93).

Achilles now makes a fascinating claim about the relative status, within the universe, of rivers, Ocean and Olympian Zeus. Achilles claims that neither Achelous, nor Ocean himself, claim equality with Zeus (21.193-5,

ισοπαρίξει). Even Ocean is afraid of Zeus' lightning and thunder (21.198-9). But this is a rhetorical claim made by Achilles, not a statement of fact. The ease with which the River—who is himself a son of Zeus—is about to vanquish the great-grandson of Zeus and son of Thetis certainly calls the veracity of the claim into question.

The fish devour the fat around Asteropaeus' kidneys, and Achilles despatches seven more Paeonians (21.203-10), before Scamander finally reaches breaking-point and addresses Achilles directly. Thee deep-rippling River 'likened himself to a man, and spoke from out of the deep eddies' (21.13). It is at this point that we rejoin the narrative of the *Iliad* at the point where this article began: Achilles cannot equal the river in combat, and two similes point to man's inability to control nature without unforeseen consequences, and man's utter helplessness in the face of a river that has without human intervention become a total threat to human survival.

We have reached not an impasse, but the moment when the mighty Achilles seems inevitably to be about to be destroyed by the river whose course he has obstructed and who has now broken his banks to pursue him across the plain (21.233-9). Human excellence and human technology in the forging of arms have met their limits in the form of retaliation from the natural world. Only supernatural intervention can prevent Achilles from succumbing now, and it comes in the form of Poseidon and Athena. They assume human form and clasp his hands. Poseidon tells him that the River will soon give him respite, and that he must continue to drive the Trojans back into Troy (21.284-97).

Given new strength by Athena, Achilles now faces the River again, and the River has difficulty in withstanding him. But the River has not run out of resources. There are many other rivers to call upon. Scamander is still full of rage (*menos*) and in his wrath raises himself on high, turning his surge into the form of a crest, and he calls on his brother the River Simois to his aid. In one of the most terrifying speeches in the *Iliad*, River-god exhorts River-god (21.311-14):

Come quickly to help me. Fill your streams
with water from the springs, arouse all your torrents,
raise a huge wave, stir up a mighty roar
of tree-trunks and stones.

Scamander predicts that Achilles' strength, beauty and even arms will not be able to save him (21.317-21):

They will lie deep beneath the marsh
covered up with slime. And as for him, I will enfold him
in sands, pouring over him a layer of silt

beyond measurement (μυρίον). The Achaeans will not know where to gather his bones, under such a depth of mud I will conceal him.

This is one of several images the *Iliad* offers us of all traces of human activity being erased and hidden from later view by the action of elemental forces and gods. In book 15, the Trojan battalions pour over the bridge led by Apollo. He kicks down the Achaeans' wall, 'as easily as a child playing on the sea-shore, who has built a house of sand and then kicks it down again and destroys it' (15.363-5). The poet describes how even the last vestiges of the Greek fortifications were obliterated after the war by Poseidon and Apollo, who inundated the shore for nine long days, before Poseidon smashed away every last beam and stone with his trident, and made the coast of the Hellespont smooth again, and covered the beach with sand (12.15-33). These images implicitly negate the poem's claim to lend immortality to the heroic warfare it narrates by revealing a physical world where all signs that humans had ever existed have been obliterated.

After summoning Simois, Scamander gathers all his force and is about to overwhelm Achilles (21.324-7):

He spoke, and rose churning and seething from on high against Achilles,
boiling with foam and blood and corpses.
The purple flood of the heaven-fed River stood
towering above him, and was about to take down the son of Peleus.

It takes another Olympian to rescue Achilles from the River's redoubled fury. Hera now intervenes. She tells her son Hephaestus to send forth fire, which she will exacerbate by rousing western and southern winds from the sea to fan the flames. The fire will destroy all the Trojan dead and Trojan battle gear; Hephaestus is to burn up the trees that line the River's banks and not cease until she commands him (21.328-41).

Hephaestus obeys. The fire flies across the plain, burning all the corpses and drying out the soil. In a peculiar simile, the process is likened to the effect of the North Wind, Boreas, drying out a rain-sodden field at harvest-time, randomly bringing joy to its farmer: natural events for which men are not responsible can work in their favour as well as to their detriment (21.346-9). But now Hephaestus turns his flames against the River. Here the poet produces the very opposite of the familiar classical *locus amoenus* describing idyllic pastoral scenes, lines which make the destruction of flora and fauna by fire (21.350-5):

Burning were the elms and the willows and the tamarisks.
Burning were the lotus and the rushes and the galingale,
that grew in abundance by the River's lovely streams.

In sore affliction were the eels and the fishes in the eddies;
 they were tumbling in all directions, tormented by the blasts of wily
 Hephaestus.
 Burning, too, was the mighty River.

This is truly a dystopian vision of organic life being annihilated by a fire which is, ultimately, nature's response to gross pollution caused by human acts of warfare.

The climactic half-line, saying that even the mighty River himself was alight (21.355), must today prompt memories of the appalling incidences of burning rivers caused in recent times by human pollution, usually oil or chemical spillage. The Meiyu River in Eastern China burst into flame on March 5th 2014. Its waters were fearfully polluted by chemicals, oil and untreated sewage from factories upstream. The flames reached over 16 feet high and destroyed cars parked along the riverbanks.⁵ In 1969, the Rouge River in Detroit, which is encircled by petroleum industry works, caused nearby oil tank storage buildings to explode and rendered the city's air unbreathable.⁶ There are many other shocking examples.

But at this point in the *Iliad* Scamander gives in. He realises that it is not worth sacrificing his own interests for the good of saving the Trojans. What it to him as River, responsible for his own ecosystem, if some humans defeat some others? The gods now go to war with each other until it is time for Achilles finally to face Hector. But the real point of the Scamander sequence is that the battles between Achilles and the River, and the River and the Fire-God, aestheticise the eventual consequences of the entire wasteful mode of production—Hephaestus was last seen bronze-smelting for war, but now plays the key role in the destruction of the natural environment and the wrecking of the entire Scamander ecosystem. None of this would have been necessary had the Achaeans never made war on Troy in the first place. None of this would have happened if Achilles had not extended the effects of his rage beyond humanity to the natural world and so carelessly polluted and distorted the very watercourse of Scamander.

Perhaps the most horrifying picture of planetary destruction in the ancient repertoire is formed in the visual imagination, suitably enough, of the lord of the dead, Hades or Aidoneus, 'The One Who Makes Things Unseeable'. In the book preceding Achilles' fight with the River, when the

⁵ See <https://strangesounds.org/2014/03/water-on-fire-polluted-meiyu-river-ignites-in-whenzou-china.html>

⁶ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/rouge-river-john-hartig-windsor-detroit-1.5314407>

gods marshal themselves for war, the poem offers a terrifying picture of a world split in two by an earthquake (20.56-65):

Then the father of men and gods thundered terribly
on high. From underneath, Poseidon shook
the boundless earth and the steep peaks of the mountains.
The roots of Ida with its many fountains were all shaken,
and her summits, and the Trojans' city and the ship of the Achaeans.
Underneath, Aidoneus, lord of those below, was terrified,
and in his terror leapt from his throne and shouted,
fearing that above him Poseidon the Earthshaker would cleave the earth,
and reveal his habitations to mortals and immortals,
dreadful in appearance and slimy, so even the gods abhor them.

Hades feels the tremors shaking the very matter out of which the earth above and around him. He fears a vertical chasm will split the horizontal surface of the earth to reveal his damp demesne in the deepest underworld.

A distinctive feature Hades' view of the world is that its constituents are unbounded—it is 'without limit' (20.58 *γαῖαν ἀπειρεσίην*). A crucial difference between the 21st-century perception of the earth and that of Homer's audience, and most generations since, is that we now know there are limits to the earth and all its resources. The notion that we need to acknowledge the terrifying limitedness of natural resources was popularized in 1953 in Fairfield Osborn's seminal *The Limits of the Earth*, where he observed that the history of Greece and Rome 'assumes the character of a prologue to modern times'.⁷ Trying to imagine ourselves into a mindset where there were always new lands to conquer, new forests to chop down and new seams of ore to mine is an impossibility. But we can begin to glimpse what it felt like by examining the idiom of infinitude that informs Hades' view of the limitless earth and numerous other magniloquent Homeric expressions.

Timber from the forests of Ida is repeatedly said to be of unutterable extent, unspeakable, infinite. At the final emotional climax of the *Iliad*, after forty days of conflict, brutality and emotional agony, Priam asks Achilles for permission for his Trojans to leave the city inside which they are pent up to gather wood from faraway on the mountain (24.662-3). On his return, he orders the Trojans to collect wood for the dead Hector's pyre. It is to be a great pyre, fitting for the best of the Trojan warriors. The men of the city go out to the mountains: 'for nine days they collected immeasurable amounts of wood' (24.795, *ἐννῆμαρ μὲν τοί γε ἀγίνεον ἄσπετον ὕλην*).

⁷ Fairfield Osborn, *The Limits of the Earth* (Boston, MA: Little & Brown, 1953) 11.

The Greek word ‘immeasurable’ here, *aspetos*, literally means ‘too great to be spoken of’, or ‘infinite’. Homer uses it elsewhere of cosmic elements—the sky, the stream of Ocean, the waters of the sea (*Il.* 8.558, 18.403, 23.127). The early philosopher Empedocles uses it to describe the infinity of time (31 B 16 Diels-Kranz). Homer’s choice of epithet here reveals a secret about the worldview of the 8th century BCE, when his epics reached their final form. Timber was seen an infinite resource, and as such could be consumed in gargantuan quantities to make a statement at a funeral. Timber is not infinite. We know that now. The UN Environment Programme’s 2020 report *The State of the World’s Forests* makes for a bitter and terrifying read.⁸

Immeasurability, as we have seen, is a feature of the silt with which Scamander predicts he will conceal Achilles corpse (21.319-20). It is also said to be a characteristic of the bronze war equipment of the Achaeans as they march forth (ἀπὸ χαλκοῦ θεσπεσίῳ, 2.457), its gleam reaching the heavens. The flocks of sheep and goats that Iphidamas had promised as an additional bride price for his wife before he left for Troy (τά οἱ ἄσπετα ποιμαίνοντο, 11.245) were unutterable, in addition to the more prosaic quantity of a hundred cattle he had already put down as a deposit. The Hellespont is ‘boundless’, without limits (24.545, Ἑλλήσποντος ἀπείρων), as is the land of Troy that raises its voice to lament Hector (24.776). The Trojans march making a clamour like cranes fleeing from wintry storms and ‘boundless rain’ (ἀθέσφατον ὄμβρον, 3.4). A false concept of ecological and environmental limitlessness is therefore as key to the depiction of the wrath of Achilles in the *Iliad* as the never-ending questioning of the exact power relations between man and natural phenomena, man and god, and god and natural phenomena.

By developing an ecological consciousness, and interpreting the *furor* of *Iliad* 21 ecocritically to expose its environmental unconscious, we can perhaps read Achilles’ wrath in a way that can help us begin to heal the rifts between humans and the environment and develop a better way of life in which Homer’s phantasmagoric, psychedelic dystopian visions of elemental strife and chaos never become actuality. In this better way of life, humans, animals, plants, rivers and fire can flourish in reciprocal cooperation rather than antagonistic reciprocal disruption. There must be a way to relinquish our rage, and make water-courses through our orchards which do not do such damage to our rivers that they retaliate like Homer’s Scamander.

⁸ Accessible at <https://www.fao.org/state-of-forests/en/>.

CHAPTER TWO

BEAUTY IN WAR? CREATION AND DESTRUCTION IN HOMER'S *ILLIAD*¹

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Doch was kümmert es mich! Wer Waffen schmiedet, bereitet
Krieg und muß davon der Zither Klang nicht erwarten.
Also sprach er und ging und murrte, die Göttingen lachten.

J. W. von Goethe, *Achilleis*

ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμῶν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός·
ἄλλοιοῦται δὲ ὅκωσπερ <πῦρ>, ὁκόταν συμμιγῇ θυώμασιν,
ὀνομάζεται καθ' ἡδονὴν ἐκάστου.

Herakleitos, D 48 Laks-Most²

I would like to begin by highlighting two moments in the *Iliad*, the first short after the beginning of what Taplin (1992, 11-21) argues is the third part of the poem; the second moment, almost at the end of that part. The first is the short but quite emblematic and resounding speech of Hephaestus to Thetis, promising new weapons to Achilles (*Il.* 18.463-67):³

'Do not fear. Let not these things be a thought in your mind.
And I wish that I could hide him away from death and its sorrow
at that time when his hard fate comes upon him, as surely 465
as there shall be fine armour for him, such as another

¹ I wish to thank Fernanda Brasete for giving me the opportunity to present a first draft of this chapter in Aveiro and to Gabriela Canazart and Leonardo Antunes for their generous reading of the text.

² "God: day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger. He changes just as fire, when it is mixed together with incense, is named according to the scent of each one" (Laks, Most, 2016, p. 160-1).

³ Translations from the *Iliad* are from Lattimore (1951).

man out of many men shall wonder at, when he looks on it.'

The second moment signals the end of the encounter between Priam and Achilles in the Achaean camp (*Il.* 24.628-33):

But when they had put aside their desire for eating and drinking,
 Priam, son of Dardanos, gazed upon Achilleus, wondering
 at his size and beauty, for he seemed like an outright vision
 of gods. Achilleus in turn gazed on Dardanian Priam
 and wondered, as he saw his brave looks and listened to him talking.
 But when they had taken their fill of gazing one on the other...

These two passages not only have in common the explicit mention of astonishment or wonder (*thauma*, in Greek), a feeling which concerns a dense experience linked primarily to the senses,⁴ but also the connection between this feeling and dead heroes, that is, Achilles and Hector, and so, metonymically, the very end of the age of heroes. In short, these passages are acutely self-referential; they show a reflection on the epic song itself.

And so I come to the terms 'creation' and 'destruction' in the title of this chapter. They refer to the experience unfolded in the two passages just mentioned. In both scenes wonder depends on the creation of a poetic *tour de force* – the new shield and the wondrous encounter between Priam and Achilles is produced – which is intimately linked to the destruction of life. Instead of exploring these two scenes, however, I will stop at four other passages and sketch what I conceive as a fundamental force or vector in the final third of the poem, the tension between the phenomena of creation and destruction.

Euphorbus

Euphorbus, the Trojan who in the *Iliad* wounds Patroclus before this Achaean warrior is struck by Hector (*Il.* 16.805-21), is the first victim at the beginning of Book 17, which tells of the struggle for the corpse of Achilles' ersatz. The nearly 70 lines dedicated to the confrontation between Euphorbus and Menelaus (*Il.* 17.1-69) are punctuated by four similes that collaborate to individualize the passage, given also that the same animal, a cow, appears in the first (4-5) and the last (62-67), in the former showing agency, in the latter as a passive victim of a lion. The first simile is elusive – it compares Menelaus, who defends the corpse of Patroclus, to a cow which has just had its first calf – but the second (20-22), the only one not

⁴ On that kind of feeling, see most recently Lightfoot (2021).

pronounced by the narrator, and the fourth, both focus on predators and its tenor recurs in comparable similes. But it is the third that interests me the most; it amplifies the moment of Euphorbus' death (17.45-60):

And after him Atreus' son, Menelaos,	45
made his prayer to father Zeus and lunged with the bronze spear	
and as he was drawing back caught him in the pit of the gullet	
and leaned in on the stroke in the confidence of his strong hand,	
and clean through the soft part of the neck the spearpoint was driven.	
He fell, thunderously, and his armour clattered upon him,	50
and his hair, lovely as the Graces, was splattered with blood, those	
braided locks caught waspwise in gold and silver. As some	
slip of an olive tree strong-growing that a man raises	
in a lonely place, and drenched it with generous water, so that	
it blossoms into beauty, and the blasts of winds from all quarters	55
tremble it, and it bursts into pale blossoming. But then	
a wind suddenly in a great tempest descending upon it	
wrenches it out of its stand and lays it at length on the ground; such	
was Euphorbos of the strong ash spear, the son of Panthoös,	
whom Menelaos Atreides killed, and was stripping his armour.	60

Menelaus will kill many more Achaeans in the battle around Patroclus' corpse,⁵ but here, and this is not uncommon in the poem, the vanquished is not less prominent than the victor. Furthermore, even if we accept that Menelaus is correct in his criticism of Euphorbus' boast a little earlier (19-32)⁶ - Euphorbus had overstated his role in Patroclus' death and ordered Menelaus to back off (12-17) - and that the poet is indicating that he shares this criticism by causing Euphorbus to be struck down in the throat,⁷ it should be noted that the exact location of the wound is unheard of in the poem (Stelow, 2020, 93), though boasts are one of its regular speech acts (Kyriakou, 2001). If this is taken into consideration, then emphasis on the beauty of the corpse, made explicit in the description of the olive tree, need not be read as a reinforcement of the mismatch between Euphorbus' boastful speech and the result of the confrontation, or, in a simplified way, as a suggestion that Euphorbus were a kind of Paris, whose beauty is emphasized when he loses to Menelaus in book 3 (*Il.* 3.1-78). McLeod (1982, 49) sums

⁵ On Menelaus' *aristeia* in this book and his importance in the poem overall, see Stelow (2020, 29-115).

⁶ Parks (1990, 16) concludes his analysis of the three speeches by stating that they are "highly interactive and the flying exchange as a whole remarkably coherent".

⁷ "The boastful Euphorbos is fittingly wounded through the throat" (Edwards, 1991, 67).

up the simile's effect well: "The simile is of a common type: the fall of a warrior is compared to the fall of a tree. Here the simile expresses, beyond that, not only the beauty of the young man, but also the care of the parents, whose bereavement is so often mentioned in Homeric descriptions of deaths; and the winds which the sapling resists and the wind which finally flattens it are like the combats Euphorbus has come through before and the one in which he has just succumbed." Mcleod seem to suggest that the main function of beauty, signalling the young man's excellence and age, is to sharpen our experience of parental grief. What I want to propose, in addition, is that the passage, in its rich *enargeia*,⁸ reverberates an unresolved tension between beauty and dirt, life and death, creation and destruction, which in turn is constitutive of the very genre of archaic heroic epic.⁹

I will explore an equivalent tension in three more scenes, focusing on the ways in which this tension, in addition to articulating central values in the Homeric universe, collaborates to make the aesthetic experience of the audience of the poem more dense and intense.¹⁰

Lycaon

Euphorbus is the first Trojan killed after Hektor's great feat of killing Patroclus, and so it could be argued that it begins a narrative arc that ends with Hector's death. In that arc two scenes excel in their depiction of the tension I am focussing on, the death of Lycaon, son of Priam (*Il.* 21.34-135), and the supplication that Priam addresses to his favorite son Hector (*Il.* 22.25-78).

The emotional impact of the scene in which Lycaon fails in arousing pity in Achilles is buttressed by the tension built by some pair of opposites:¹¹ the horrific river full of crying bodies, blood and corpses (*Il.* 21.1-26) versus

⁸ On *enargeia* in the Homeric poems, see Grethlein and Huitink (2017).

⁹ For a strong defense of this tension as constitutive of a putative Homeric poetics, see Halliwell (2011, 36-92), and more recently and following parallel arguments, see also Porter (2021, 175-218).

¹⁰ The different albeit in large measure complementary aesthetic readings of archaic Greek poetry developed in Halliwell (2011), Peponi (2012) and Porter (2021) were fundamental to my take on the poem, specially the last one.

¹¹ My aim is not to examine all the many subtleties of this complex scene. Reinhardt (1961, 435-38) may be wrong in judging its development as late, but he is right in pointing to its many oddities. Lynn-George (1988, 203-4) stresses the collision between past and present in the episode.

the orchard where in the past Achilles captured Lycaon (36, 77)¹²; the defenseless posture of Lycaon (50-51), the quintessence of the lesser heroes of the poem,¹³ versus Achilles' violent killing spree (116-27); and last but not least, the one between life and death (47-48), between Lycaon's desperate attempt to hold to his life (65-66) and Achilles' desire to keep killing Trojans (33, 103-5). The raw materiality of the scene makes it difficult to hear in Achilles' speeches, which Wilamowitz claimed to be "pure gold",¹⁴ a supposed major lesson of the *Iliad*, that the most powerful force is death, and the only possible posture of mortals is to recognize it as such.¹⁵ When Achilles affirms that because he will also die there is no reason for him to stop killing Trojans, since given his beauty and greatness, he is the closest a mortal can get to the divine sphere, the reader may or even should ask how out of joint is this human interaction that ends up in blood moistening the earth and a meal for fish (119-27), in fact, an encounter quite different from the first meeting between these enemies, when Achilles and the captured Lycaon ended up sharing Demeter's bread (76-77).¹⁶

¹² Orchard in which Lycaon used bronze to cut wood (37-38). Now he is completely "naked" (50), that is, unarmed in front of Achilles: spears and swords are made of bronze and the metal may refer to them metonymically. Lynn-George (1988, 203) notes that "the first stages in the fashioning of a chariot from the young branches of a fig tree follow upon the description of Achilles' chariot in the midst of carnage", that is, 20.498-503 (on this passage, see below, n. 18). Finally, the presence of Achilles' in Priam's orchard reverses in many ways the encounter between the two in *Iliad* 24.

¹³ See Strasburger (1954, 85): "Das Wesen aller "Kleinen Kämpfer" gipfelt zweifellos in inem, Lykaon".

¹⁴ Wilamowitz (1916, 87) is referring to the scene as a whole (97-136), but by comparing it with Achilles' final *speeches* to Hector in Book 22 he suggests that he is thinking mainly of Lycaon's and Achilles' speeches.

¹⁵ See also Marg (1976, 17), a paper originally published in 1942: "Gegenüber dem Tod, der stärksten Macht, der sich der Mensch ausgesetzt sieht, wird hier eine Einsicht eingesetzt, keine Hoffnung und keine Glaubensgewißheit, daß diese Macht zu umgehen oder zu besiegen sei, sondern eben die Anerkennung dieser Macht. Damit sind wir im Zentrum des Todesgedankens in der Ilias... Mitten im Rasen um den gefallenen Freund und in seinen höchsten Triumphen verhält er einen Augenblick, beugt sich über den verlorenen Feind und stellt sich neben ihn, als ein Todgeweihter. In diesem Wissen um das menschliche Leben, seine Begrenzung, ist ihm die Gemeinsamkeit selbst zum Feind gegeben; und dieser wird über sich selbst hinausgewiesen und empfängt so den letzten Stoß ergeben. In dieser Szene spricht sich nicht die besondere Eigenart eines Menschen aus, sondern allgemein Menschliches."

¹⁶ Schein (1984, 148: "solidarity of death") and Taplin (1992, 223: "'familial' bond of mortality") try hard to find something positive in this interaction. More to the

In fact, Achilles' beauty also seems to be mentioned so that the river Scamander, a little bit later in a proposal to his brother that they detain Achilles, may contrastively picture the warrior and his arms being defiled under mud (*Il.* 21.316-18): "For I say that his strength will not be enough for him nor his beauty nor his arms in their splendour, which somewhere deep down under the waters shall lie folded under the mud..."¹⁷ Yes, Scamander's power will be blocked by Hephaestus, precisely the creator of the beautiful weapons, but the way in which this passage echoes what is perhaps the most remarkable reference to the reception of the *Iliad* contained in the poem itself – the fate of the Achaean wall destroyed by a river "flood" instigated by Poseidon (12.10-34) –¹⁸ reinforces that there is something quite unsettling in Achilles' speeches, irreducible, therefore, to a lesson on the mortal essence of man or even to "a will toward death" (Schein, 1984, 148), since that was not why Hephaestus created his arms.

Priam

The second passage in question is embedded in Priam's supplication to Hector urging him not to face Achilles and accept the security offered by the walls of the city (*Il.* 22.37-76). It is the well-known contrast between the corpse of a young man killed in battle and that of an old man lying in a conquered city (56-76):

Come then inside the wall, my child, so that you can rescue
 the Trojans and the women of Troy, neither win the high glory
 for Peleus' son, and yourself be robbed of your very life. Oh, take
 pity on me, the unfortunate still alive, still sentient
 but ill-starred, whom the father, Kronos' son, on the threshold of old age 60
 will blast with hard fate, after I have looked upon evils
 and seen my sons destroyed and my daughters dragged away captive
 and the chambers of marriage wrecked and the innocent children taken
 and dashed to the ground in the hatefulness of war, and the wives
 of my sons dragged off by the accursed hands of the Achaians. 65
 And myself last of all, my dogs in front of my doorway

A

will rip me raw, after some man with stroke of the sharp bronze
 spear, or with spearcast, has tom the life out of my body;

point Lynn-George (1988, 207), who sees "a violence tending towards complete obliteration" at the end of the episode.

¹⁷ See also the image in 20.498-503, an eerie combination of corpses, blood, human craft (the car) and the striving for *kudos*.

¹⁸ On this reading of the passage, see Porter (2011).

those dogs I raised in my halls to be at my table, to guard my
gates, who will lap my blood in the savagery of their anger 70
and then lie down in my courts. For a young man all is decorous
B
when he is cut down in battle and tom with the sharp bronze, and lies there
dead, and though dead still all that shows about him is beautiful;
C
but when an old man is dead and down, and the dogs mutilate
C'/B'
the grey head and the grey beard and the parts that are secret, 75
A'
this, for all sad mortality, is the sight most pitiful.

I will not return to the two most common discussions related to the passage, namely, whether the beauty of the dead young warrior is a topic wrongly chosen by Priam to persuade Hector, and whether the ideology behind the passage would be that of the beautiful death as configured in the tradition of archaic martial elegy.¹⁹ My point is that Priam strives to evoke the horror of Troy being destroyed,²⁰ and the contrast of his own corpse with that of a young warrior accentuates the wretchedness of the elder but also problematizes the son's decision not to return. An important difference from Tyrtaeus is Priam's emphasis on his old age, which is condensed into the focus on dogs, an image that helps creating a ring structure within the speech (ABCA'B'C' above). Hector's beauty mainly accentuates the pathetic of a terrible image, Priam's crazed hounds drinking his blood. This is the image that mostly appeals to the audience's imagination.

But that is not all. The emphatic mention of dogs establishes a relationship with the simile used shortly before to define Achilles' approach to the walls of Troy as perceived by Priam(21-35):

He spoke, and stalked away against the city, with high thoughts
in mind, and in tearing speed, like a racehorse with his chariot
who runs lightly as he pulls the chariot over the flat land.
Such was the action of Achilleus in feet and quick knees.
The aged Priam was the first of all whose eyes saw him 25
as he swept across the flat land in full shining, like that star
which comes on in the autumn and whose conspicuous brightness
far outshines the stars that are numbered in the night's darkening,
the star they give the name of Orion's Dog, which is brightest

¹⁹ On these discussions, see v. g. Richardson (1993, *ad loc*), West (2011, 385), and de Jong (2011, *ad loc*), all with further bibliography.

²⁰ As do Andromache (*Il.* 6.413-29) and Briseis (*Il.* 19.291-99) when they evoke the cities they used to live in.

among the stars, and yet is wrought as a sign of evil 30
 and brings on the great fever for unfortunate mortals.
 Such was the flare of the bronze that girt his chest in his running.
 The old man groaned aloud and with both hands high uplifted
 beat his head, and groaned amain, and spoke supplicating
 his beloved son... 35

No less important than the simile itself, which functions as a focalization of Priam,²¹ is that for the first time the audience experiences Achilles through the elder's perception. In the passages under discussion, the audience's experience, with regard to Achilles and Hector, progressively gains in texture and complexity before reaching maximum intensity in Book 24, regarding Achilles, in his meeting with Priam, and regarding Hector, in the laments of Andromache, Hecuba and Helen.

The glow of warriors' weapons is a commonplace in the poem, but the variety of ways in which the Homeric poet accentuates it is not small, especially by means of fire and stars similes. In this sense, it should come as no surprise that in the work known as the *Contest between Homer and Hesiod*, a prose text from the time of the emperor Hadrian but which goes back to the an Athenian source from the 4th centry bC (Bassino 2019), the character Homer, in order to defeat Hesiod, chooses a combination of two excerpts from *Iliad* 13 (lines 126-33 and 339-44) as the best he ever composed. These lines focus on the glow of both armies, and the reaction of the internal audience to this choice is one of wonder and amazement (*Contest* §§12-13).²² As for Achilles' shinny weapons, before they are gazed by Priam from the Trojan wall, these had already received, after the warrior had put them on for the very first time, not only two brief similes, one having as vehicule the brightness of the moon, the other, a generic star, but also a long one, whose content is a bonfire (*Il* 19.369-83). There is no negative

²¹ See Fränkel (1921, 48) and de Jong (2011, 126). Neer (2010, 47), commenting the passage in question and also the Achilles' "epiphany" to the Trojans in *Il*. 18.202-38, states that "[p]assages such as these vividly evoke not just a radiant body but also a situated spectator, a distinct vantage-point: on a distant island or a lofty wall. In so doing they suggest how a flashing light might locate the eye in time and space, as that toward which, or for which, a beam shines, variously as a call for help or a sign of doom."

²² The verb is *thaumazō*, which also defines the climax of the meeting between Achilles and Priam in Book 24; on the feeling present in this scene, see Lightfoot (2021, 112-18). That the same feeling stands at the beginning of the baneful encounter between Achilles and Lykaon (*Il*. 21.54) is suggestive that this scene should be read together with the other scenes that depict an extended encounter between Achilles and members of the Trojan royal family.

tone whatsoever in these similes, and that changes at the beginning of *Iliad* 22 only because of Priam's focalization:²³ Sirius, the dog of Orion, explicitly becomes a "a sign of evil" (*kakon sēma*, 30).

This passage stands out also because Priam's subsequent mention of *dogs* attached to corpses may be retrospectively linked to it. Both images collapse into each other evoking the inevitable end well known by the audience, the end of Troy. That means that the simile not only communicates Priam's feelings when he watches Achilles, but the poet, by almost making explicit how the old man experiences the threatening approach of Achilles, puts himself in the place of the Priam, and it is this dense experience that we will again and again be able to feel in this book and in the last one. Many time the our experience of Hector and Achilles include Priam's focus, and this reinforces that what we feel about one cannot be separated from what we feel about the other, a mixture of pleasure and disgust.²⁴ On a smaller scale, this can already be seen in line 30 quoted above: "which is brightest among the stars, and yet is wrought as a sign of evil". The two hemispheres produce a tension: the splendor of Sirius, that is, of Achilles, is not separable from its dismal character (Richardson, 1993, 109).

Priam manages to avoid the clash between Hector and Achilles only in his imagination, when he expresses the wish that the gods would turn against the Achaean and Achilles' corpse would be the target of dogs and birds of prey (*Il.* 22.41-43). Closer to what will really happen, and also more complex, is the second image involving dogs and corpses developed by Priam²⁵. From what Priam says, we may infer that there is nothing beautiful in any human corpse, old or young, eaten by dogs, but Priam does not explicitly mention what is *kalos* in the corpse of a young warrior beaten by the enemy. We may infer that it is something to do with physical beauty inherent to the young male body (by way of contrast with line 75), but Hector's soon to be heard soliloquy (99-130), however, would suggest that, in the first place, it is a question of moral values with social and political consequences, that is, to be seen as *agathos* by his people when facing death

²³ Between these two points in the narrative, no other simile or comparison is used for Achilles' arms. In book 21, fire is ubiquously important in the action itself and in a simile, but never regarding the arms. See also how Scamander pictures the arms in 21.316-18, mentioned above.

²⁴ On the mixture of pleasure and pain as a Platonic concept "pertinent to Greek aesthetics", see Peponi (2012: 51-58) and specially Liebert (2017).

²⁵ In both passages, not only are dogs mentioned, but the verb *keimai* is highlighted in the same initial position (43, 71, 73). Richardson (1993, 114) notes that in line 73 "κεῖσθαι is added somewhat awkwardly (contrast Tyrt. fr. 10.22), and the rest of the line repeats the idea of 71-2 in a rather weak way".

in battle (106-10). As for Priam's speech, it is certainly effective in its vivid evocation (*enargeia*) of an old man's corpse. However, as Hector will not heed his father's supplication, this places Priam, in relation to Hector, in the same position as Lycaon in relation to Achilles,²⁶ that is, the cause of the future mutilation of Priam's corpse will have been, a posteriori and indirectly, his own son's choice to face the enemy.²⁷

Finally, to this image of the dead old man and the dogs that devour him, whose description is more vivid than the synthesis of what lies ahead of Priam's family as a whole, especially women and children (62-65), is added another image of great pathos and vividness, the old mother Hecuba baring her breast (77-81). Father and mother direct a supplication to their son, but also use the language²⁸ and gestures of lamentation (de Jong, 2011, 67, 78). In fact, both speeches rehearse not only Priam's and Hecuba's "personal lament" (the term is used by Tsagalis, 2004) to be directed to Hector's body immediately *after* his death, but also are linked to Andromache's following lament (*Il.* 22.414-515). In fact, the important and, in this book, all pervasive

²⁶ Reinhardt (1961, 436) asks: "Ist es nicht seltsam, dass sich in der Lykaon-Episode und im Flehen des Priamos dasselbe wiederholt?". Note also that Lycaon and Achilles perceive what they have in common (Lynn-George, 1988, 204), a feature also of the encounter between Priam and Achilles: the special albeit very short nearness between these two is tragically impossible in book 22 between Priam and Achilles. But Hector and Priam also progressively become one by acquiring, between books 22 and 24, and Achillean quality, solitude (Tsagalis, 2004, 151-53).

²⁷ Priam even mentions Lycaon to Hector (*Il.* 22.46). Because Hector refuses to hear his father, this supplication resemble all the other battlefield supplications in the main story of the poem.

²⁸ Of the themes of the *goos*, the ritual lament in the *Iliad*, one of them is built into Priam's supplication, "a comparison between the dead and/or between the present sufferings of the mourner and other past sufferings, stressing the exceptionality of the present loss and thus of the present grief, introducing an implicit aretology of the deceased" (Tsagalis, 2004, 15). On this theme in Priam's later lament in book 22, see Tsagalis (2004, 153). Specifically on line 72, see Richardson (1993, 114): "The series of dative endings, repetition of the same idea, and heavy spondaic opening all combine to give this line a dirge-like effect." On Hecuba's speech, see Richardson (1993, 155): "Her thoughts turn to the funeral lament which it would be the duty of his mother and wife to make if he dies"; see also Tsagalis (2004, 155-56). Not only by laying bare her breast but also in her speech, Hecuba stresses the same strong (physical and/ or biological) bond between mother and son that is the case in other strict personal laments in the poem (see Thetis in *Il.* 18.52-77). Hecuba's later lament (*Il.* 22.431-36) is quite short, but see line 428 and compare it to 18.54-55; see also Tsagalis (2004, 155), who affirms: "the use of similar diction suggests that the paragon pair of mother and son (Thetis-Achilles) exercises its influence on the Trojan dyad of mother and son (Hecuba-Hector), with the former shaping the latter."

theme of the mutilation of the corpse,²⁹ reaches its climax in this last long lament (508-10³⁰). Outside the epic context, laments would be marked by the materiality of their sound,³¹ but the epic diction, I submit, explore other venues, specially, at least in the scene under scrutiny, certain images and diction. Independent of their origin (ritual, poetic), these are different ways to sensitize the audience, to combine pleasure and horror, beauty and repulsion.

Hector's Body

I come, then, to my last passage, the final confrontation between Hector and Achilles' (Il. 22.306-27):

So he spoke, and pulling out the sharp sword that was slung
 at the hollow of his side, huge and heavy, and gathering
 himself together, he made his swoop, like a high-flown eagle
 who launches himself out of the murk of the clouds on the flat land
 to catch away a tender lamb or a shivering hare; so 310
 Hektor made his swoop, swinging his sharp sword, and Achilles
 charged, and the heart within him he loaded with savage fury.³²
 In front of his chest the beautiful elaborate great shield
 covered him, and with the glittering helm with four horns
 he nodded; the lovely golden fringes were shaken about it 315
 which Hephaistos had driven close along the horn of the helmet.
 And as a star moves among stars in the night's darkening,
 Hesper, who is the fairest star who stands in the sky, such
 was the shining from the pointed spear Achilles was shaking
 in his right hand with evil intention toward brilliant Hektor. 320
 He was eyeing Hektor's splendid body, to see where it might best
 give way, but all the rest of the skin was held in the armour,
 brazen and splendid, he stripped when he cut down the strength of Patroklos;
 yet showed where the collar-bones hold the neck from the shoulders,
 the throat, where death of the soul comes most swiftly; in this place 325
 brilliant Achilles drove the spear as he came on in fury,
 and clean through the soft part of the neck the spearpoint was driven.

²⁹ It is mentioned by Hecuba in her plea to Hector (89).

³⁰ See Tsagalis (2004, 132).

³¹ This difference is alluded to in Il. 24.729-24. Seminal in its discussion of all aspects of ritual lamentation, see Alexiou (2002).

³² Translation slightly changed.

I start with the formulation “the heart within him he loaded with savage fury” (312)³³, which is noteworthy for more than one reason: it is not often in Homer that a human agent is the grammatical subject of a verb which has her own *menos* (“fury”, in Lattimore’s translation) as its object and so is somehow under the control of her, and only here does the adjective *agrios* (“savage”) qualify it.³⁴ “Savage”, in turn, is in tension with “beautiful elaborate” (*kalon daidaleon*), adjectives that qualify the shield of Achilles in the next line and like *agrios* are also highlighted at the beginning of the hexameter.

Next, four other forms of the same adjective *kalos* (“beautiful”) are used in reference to Achilles and Hector (315-23).³⁵ De Jong (2011, 136) has a strong interpretation of the passage: “the narrator has opted at this stage to dwell on the beauty of victory rather than the pathos of death. The whole passage, with its stress on the beauty and glitter of Achilles’ armour (...) recalls, partly verbatim, the scene of Achilles putting on his new armour for the first time. The recollection of this earlier scene brings the story full circle”. However, the full context and internal allusion to the grim death of Patroclus are in stark contrast to such a “beauty of victory”. The audience can easily recall that when Patroclus was killed his helmet got stained with blood,³⁶ and something comparable will soon happen to Hector (368-69, 395-405). The full circle defined by this passage, therefore, is rather one that would begin with the unbeautiful death of Patroclus and end with that of Hector. The audience may also remember that Patroclus’ death follows Cebriones’ death and happens near his corpse, “as he in the turning dust lay mightily in his might, his horsemanship all forgotten” (*Il.* 16.775-6). Even if we do not (fully) accept the reading according to which this death evokes

³³ μένεος δ' ἐμπλήσατο θυμὸν/ ἀγρίου (312-13).

³⁴ *Menos* is not easy to conceptualize. I find the discussion in Bakker (2008) particularly illuminating and balanced. “Fury” is a one sided translation, but not that bad in this passage because of *agrios* qualifying it. However, we should be careful with the meaning of *agrios* as a purely negative notion. The very best heroes in the poem behave as lions when facing fierce enemies. See v.g. *Il.* 6.96-101 in which *menos* and *agrios* are separately used to define the spirit of the very best heroes, in that case, Diomedes and Achilles.

³⁵ In line 315, *deinai* is found in the majority of manuscripts. Richardson (1993, 138) and de Jong (2012, 137) affirm that *kalai* suits the context better because of the emphasis on beauty. But notice that de Jong (2011, 136) counts one too many *kal*-word in the passage in question.

³⁶ See *Il.* 16.795-800. *Il.* 22.323 virtually repeats *Il.* 17.187 (Hector informs his companions that he will put Patroclus’ arms on), and so, according to Richardson (1993, 138), “[i]t is significant that the poet echoes 17.187 just when Akhilleus is about to strike the fatal blow”.