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Lion Kings:
Heroes in the Epic Mirror

By DONNA F. WILSON

The Iliad fills the battlefield on the Trojan plain with lionlike heroes. Hektor and Aias, we are told, fight like lions that eat raw meat (omophagoi), as do the Trojans and the men of Argos. Menelaos is said to take the same joy in coming upon Alexandros as a lion takes in coming upon a carcass. Agamemnon seizes a young Trojan warrior like a lion seizes a young deer and rips its heart out. Sarpedon is described as entering the battle like a lion attacking flocks that are protected by dogs and by men wielding spears.

More than forty lion similes embellish the Iliad’s battle narratives with images of the strong and savage predatory beasts. The warriors are not demeath by comparison to them. On the contrary, as James Redfield points out, lion similes mark moments of high heroic action. Many of the marauding and hunting lion similes appear in Diomedes’, Agamemnon’s, and Patroklos’ aristeiai (a sustained and formulaic narrative of one warrior’s exploits in battle), though the poet distributes them with a fairly even hand among leading warriors of the Achaians and Trojans. The conspicuous exception is Odysseus, to whom our Iliad allot only one undeveloped lion

1. Ili. 7.255-57. When citing references for Homeric similes, I include enough of the surrounding narrative to take in the points of contact that introduce and/or cap the simile proper.
2. Ili. 15.592-93.
3. Ili. 5.780-83. The simile is applied to the Argives even when they are not fighting.
5. Ili. 11.113-21.
9. 5.136-43; 5.159-65; 11.113-21; 11.170-78; 16.751-54; 16.755-61; see also 20.164-75.
Compilations of similes, such as those in the Iliad, reflect the oral tradition of Homeric compositions. In the Iliad, the poet Homer uses similes to compare the hero Achilles to a beleaguered lion, highlighting his courage and strength. Similarly, in the Odyssey, Odysseus is associated with a lion simile, which he shares with Diomedes. 

No lion similes refer to Achilles during his absence from the battlefield. After he returns to the fighting, however, he is the only warrior to receive lion similes. The Odyssey has only six aggressive lion similes, five of which refer to Odysseus. Polypheemos, the Cyclops who eats men raw, gets the only other predatory lion simile in the poem. The marked difference in the number of lion similes in the Iliad and the Odyssey is in part a feature of the subject matter of the two poems. What is more telling than the number of lion similes is how Homer deploys them in relation to the epic hero of each poem.

In this paper, I take the similes in which Achilles and Odysseus are compared to predatory lions as a point of entry for exploring the thematics of the lion in relation to each hero in his own epic tradition. We are justified in this approach in part because Achilles and Odysseus share a restricted epithet, thumoleôn, lion-hearted, that is associated with a nexus of traditional themes critical to the construction of heroic identity in Homeric epic. The rarity and particularity of the epithet suggests that we should pay careful attention to it. Moreover, as we shall see, the lion exemplifies Iliadic heroism in both poems. Thus the lion similes referring to Achilles in the Iliad and Odysseus in the Odyssey form a potentially significant locus of intertextual allusion and arguably of intertextual polemic. The approach taken here is predicated on a lengthy history of oral composition in which archaic poetic traditions were aware of and interacted with each other, and were, in some sense, written by each other. Using textual survivals for analysis of intertextual allusion is distorted in that it is synchronic only. Nonetheless, where there is significant correspondence in thematics, diction, and narrative placement, we are justified in looking for a significant repetition and, hence, intertextual allusion. Accordingly, I turn first to a comparison of the diction and thematics associated with lion similes attached to the hero of each epic, and secondly to comparison of the narrative placement of these simile sequences in the withdrawal and return pattern that organizes each of the canonical epics.

11. Il. 10.297.  
13. Od. 4.332-40=17.124-31; 6.127-36; 22.401-06; 23.45-48 [23.48=22.402]. Penelope is once compared to a beleaguered lion (Od. 4.791), which behaves differently from marauding lions and seems to belong to another group.  
15. This approach, pioneered by Gregory Nagy (1979), has been advanced by, among others, Pietro Pucci (1987), who shows that allusions between the Iliad and Odyssey are reciprocal at the level of traditional diction, and Erwin Cook (1995), who extends the range of intertextual research to include the relationship of Homeric epic to ritual.
**Lion Kings: Diction and Thematics**

**DESPITE THE UBIQUITY** of lion similes in the *Iliad*, the epithet *thumoleôn*, lion-hearted, is restricted. Its use is confined in the *Iliad* to Herakles and Achilleus and in the *Odyssey* to Herakles and Odysseus. Herakles belongs not to the Trojan War and Return cycle, but to an earlier generation of heroes. He is one of a number of heroes in Greek myth, commonly referred to as culture heroes, who use their great power, or *biē*, to make the world safe for civilization by punishing characters who threaten it or violate its laws. But culture heroes also wreak havoc on their own people. Herakles thus embodies the ambiguity of natural force (*biē*) inherent in such figures: he preserves order by killing monsters but also destroys the bonds of friendship and family when he kills his wife and children in Thebes. He even carries the traditional theme of *biē* in his name, *Bīē Hērakleēiê*. Herakles is, moreover, widely associated with lions in Greek myth and iconography.

Culture heroes are also mediators: they traffic between the realms of the dead, the living, and the immortals. They journey to Hades and return, though they do not escape death entirely. In their own epic traditions, Achilleus and Odysseus are also presented as making a descent to Hades (*katabasis*) and subsequently gaining the particular return that is their epic destiny. Zeus himself orchestrates each hero’s return to a circle of family and/or friends. Their returns comprise at the same time a reintegration of the heroic self, which both Achilleus and Odysseus accomplish by taking compensation—whether ransom or revenge—“like a lion.” It is thus no coincidence that the *Iliad* considers Herakles to be dead and that Achilleus adopts him as a model of how to die. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, asserts that the Herakles whom Odysseus sees in Hades is only an image (*eidôn*); the real Herakles is enjoying life among the immortals with his pretty wife Hebe. He accordingly becomes a model for cheating death to some degree.

The epithet *thumoleôn* thus associates Achilleus and Odysseus, each in his own epic tradition, with the culture hero type. It denotes an essential compensation—whether ransom or revenge—“like a lion.”

16. Herakles, II. 5.639 and Od. 11.267; Achilleus, II. 7.228; Odysseus, Od. 4.724 and 814. That I can discover, the term occurs elsewhere in extant archaic and classical Greek literature only in Hesiod, Th. 1007, where it is used of Achilleus (=II. 7.228) and in Aeschylus, Fr. Teir. 26, A, fr. 212, I. 47, where it refers to Teucer (=Aristophanes, Ra. 1041).


18. For Priam’s journey to Achilleus’ hut in *Iliad* 24 as a *katabasis*, descent into Hades, see Edwards (1985).

19. That the plan of Zeus, and not Athene, is ultimately responsible for the fact and nature of Odysseus’ return to Ithaka has now been demonstrated by Marks (2001) ch. 3.


quality and it identifies them as transgressive figures in relation to the thematics of *biē*. This is true, as the lion similes will show, whether Achilleus and Odysseus are fighting or not. As we shall see, each epic also departs distinctively and programmatically from the culture-hero type.

In order to explore the deployment of lion similes in relation to the hero of each epic and the traditional themes that cluster around lion similes, it is important at the outset to devise an approach for interpreting similes as orally composed poetic devices that fall into recurring types. Richard Martin contends that, from the perspective of reception, the most notable feature of Homeric similes is the way they mark emotional peaks and punctuate the narrative, not the way they express a larger theme. On this view, an aural audience would be able to grasp the introduction of a simile as an episode marker or as an affective device immediately, but could comprehend its relation to larger themes only in retrospect. William Scott on the other hand argues that, from the perspective of the orally composing poet, theme and the simile are related compositional devices: if the poet introduces a simile, the theme he is singing suggests to him a simile family, which is made up of a stock of inherited materials. For example, if the poet is singing about the movement of a group of people and wishes to use a simile, one of the limited alternatives his traditional repertoire will suggest to him is a wind simile. The details available to the poet for extending the simile will be more or less suited to the narrative context with which the simile family is traditionally associated. A skillful poet will use traditional details, and construct others by analogy, to produce an especially apt and effective simile that complements or comments on the narrative. Nonetheless, as Scott demonstrates, there is no need for even the most important facts to correspond between simile and narrative; the facts of the simile can even disagree with the narrative. Put another way, the poets thought formally in terms of “lion similes” regardless of the extending details. If Scott is correct, meticulous comparison of the details in a discrete simile with those in the surrounding narrative, to which analysis of similes is often devoted, may reveal something of the poet’s formal skill, but ultimately tells us little about the emotive or interpretive function of a given simile or sequence of similes.

23. The formular density of similes attests to their oral composition (Ingalls [1979]); see now Martin (1997) on the placement of similes and their function in oral composition and performance. If Shipp (1972), especially 208-22, is right that similes abound in late forms, it means only that they were formed later than narrative elements in the traditional diction (see Scott [1974] 6-7).
Michael Clarke proposes that Homeric similes should be interpreted as belonging to coordinated systems. On this view, every simile presents an instantiation of a basic association of ideas. The potential meaning(s) of any one simile can resonate with countless other similes in the same group articulated in other contexts. Thus, every time the image of a lion is deployed, the relation between the narrative and the simile “is not merely the ostensible point of comparison [Vergleichspunkt] but the full range of potential points of contact between the images of beast and warrior.” Clarke argues that although we may not reduce the basic association of ideas to a universal symbol, some symbolic unity remains. We may therefore gain insight into the cumulative meaning of any simile system by comparing its scattered manifestations. On this view, we may say that the system has a cumulative effect that gives the details in any discrete simile their emotive and allusive meanings through metonymy. As a result, the most significant context for analyzing potential meaning(s) of a discrete simile is the cumulative meaning of the system. So much of Clarke’s argument is convincing. He proceeds, however, to pin the significance of recurring terms such as menos (variously “passion” or “strength”) and alke (an autonomous driving force with both aggressive and defensive qualities) on heroic psychology, almost to the exclusion of cultural associations. He consequently infers that the beast simile is a symbol of a psychological trait or mental state and concludes, “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 reveling not only in being a hero but in being a madman.” One of the aims of this paper is to demonstrate that the basic association of ideas that every lion simile potentially draws on is cultural, not psychological; it may encompass psychological states but is not limited to them. As a result, to be like a lion without mitigation leads not just to folly and imperiling oneself but to imperiling culture itself.

Homer similes often resist categorization. There is thus little consensus about which similes constitute a “group” that presents a basic association of ideas. Because a few lion similes include boars and there is some overlap in diction and motif between similes with lions and those with boars, the two beasts are sometimes considered, together with the generic thèr (beast), as

29. Clarke (1995) 139-41 excepts what he calls “isolated similes,” or similes that seem to be violently juxtaposed with their context.
32. Also Clarke (1995) 143.
33. For this interpretation of the meaning of alke and extended discussion, see Collins (1998) 1-45.
35. For this idea, see Clarke (1995) 150.
comprising a single simile family. Moreover, marauding lion similes may be
categorized primarily as herding or hunting similes, especially if the
introductory phrase refers to the flocks and not to the lion. To complicate
matters, lions are sometimes marauding, sometimes hunting or
scavenging, and in a few cases, they meet with fierce resistance from men
and dogs or are themselves hunted and beleaguered. If Martin is correct
about the function of Homeric similes as marking emotional peaks, they may
not bear the weight of elaborate typologies based on the several differences
in detail. It thus seems reasonable that, for purposes of describing the
cumulative effect of the lion simile system, a rudimentary typology of the
active or attacking lion, as opposed to a passive or beleaguered one, is
adequate. The Iliad contains thirty-eight attacking lion similes and the
Odyssey six, excluding boar and generic beast (thér) similes and including
some similes better classed as hunting or herding. Of these, sixteen are very
short, by which I mean that the content of the simile runs a line or less, and
twenty-two are extended. In the resulting catalog of forty-four similes, there
is considerable overlap in diction and detail; indeed, most of the details
common to the group may be found in the marauding lion similes alone.
Moreover, no significant details would be added to the cumulative picture by
including boar similes. A description of the system of details associated with
attacking lion similes, or the “lion simile system,” follows. It does not take
into account Odyssean similes because the claim is often made that similes in
the Odyssey are different in kind from those in the Iliad. As we shall see,
however, when Odyssean similes are compared to the system description that
follows, they do not depart from it significantly.

Four lion similes are thematically associated with a hero’s refusing
settlements or material compensation and one with him accepting it. Of these

36. For example I. 5.136-43, 159-65, 550-60; 10.482-88; 11.1217-78, 382-83, 547-54; 12.292-93, 298-
308; 13.197-202; 15.630-38; 16.751-54; 17.61-69, 540-42, 656-65; 18.161-64; probably 20.164-75, where the
lion is described as simès (harrassing); and 24.40-45; cf. Od. 6.127-36; 9.288-93; and 22.401-06.
37. For example II. 3.21-28; 8.337-42; 11.113-21, 291-95, 478-84; 16.755-61; cf. Od. 4.332-40=
17.124-31.
38. For example II. 5.136-43, 550-60; 11.547-54; 12.40-50, 298-308; 16.751-54; 17.132-37, 656-65;
18.316-23; 20.164-75; cf. Od. 4.787-94.
113-21, 126-30, 170-78, 239, 478-84, 547-54, 382-83; 12.40-50, 292-93, 298-308; 13.197-202, 15.271-80,
22.60-67; 24.40-45; and 572-73: Od. 4.332-40=17.124-31; 6.127-36; 9.288-93; 22.401-06; and 23.48
(=22.402).
113-21, 126-30, 170-78, 239, 478-84, 547-54, 382-83; 12.40-50, 292-93, 298-308; 13.197-202, 15.271-80,
22.60-67; 24.40-45; and 572-73: Od. 4.332-40=17.124-31; 6.127-36; 9.288-93; 22.401-06; and 23.48
(=22.402).
42. Friedrich (1981) 129: “All the lion similes in the Odyssey are untypical.”
five, four involve Achilles and only one is located on the battlefield. Otherwise, the poet seldom uses lion similes to refer to warriors outside of combat and deploys them most frequently to describe warriors in all-out warfare. The points of contact introducing the comparison between the beast and the warrior in combat include movements, aggressive actions, appearance, effect on their victims, and emotions or mental states. Similes frequently attribute to lions emotions that are also attributed to warriors, such as joy (ekharet), anguish (akhnutai), and raging (memaôs), though raging may refer to the lion’s or warrior’s savage actions and apparent fury alike. Similes further accord to lions states of mind common to warriors, such as trusting in his driving force (alki pepoithôs), standing proud in his strength (sthenei blèmeainôn) or simply proud (mega phroneonte). Some scholars thus infer that the cumulative or symbolic meaning of beast similes has to do primarily with motivation, emotion, or mental states. Inasmuch as the overwhelming predominance of detail contained in lion similes involves action, movement, appearance, hunger, or immediate physical and emotional response to wounding, I remain unconvinced that the cumulative effect of the lion simile system can be reduced to an abstract mental state. Scott offers a more satisfactory account of matters, contending that the traditional poets did not even conceive of psychological activity or emotional states in a general way, but thought (episodically) of using the simile when a man was joyful, sorrowful, angry, or terrified. In fact, it is reasonable to suppose that the mental states attributed to lions became associated with the beast in similes precisely because they were traditional and thematic features of warriors. On this view, the lion is accorded a heart (kêr) or spirit (thumos) as a point of contact with

44. Outside of combat, see Il. 5.780-83; 18.316-23; 24.40-45; and 24.572-73.
45. See for example the springing motion of the lion and the warrior (Il. 5.159-65; 16.751-54; and 24.572-73).
46. For example, Diomedeis (Il. 10.482-88), Sarpedon (Il. 12.292-93), and Hektor (Il. 15.630-38) attack like lions.
47. Automedon’s hands drip with blood like a lion that has eaten a bull (Il. 17.540-42).
48. The Trojans shudder around Diomedeis like goats do around a lion (Il. 11.382-83) and the Greeks are like dogs chasing a stag who are put to flight when they come upon a lion (Il. 15.271-80).
49. See for example Il. 3.21-28, where Menelaos rejoices like a lion who sees a carcass.
50. Il. 3.21-28.
51. Il. 18.316-23.
52. Il. 5.136-43; 11.239; and 13.197-202.
53. Il. 5.297-302, though it is unclear whether the intended referent is the lion, Aineias, or both.
54. Il. 17.132-37.
55. Il. 16.755-61.
56. See for example Clarke (1995).
the warrior in order to exploit the likeness between the bloody work of the warrior and the (usually hungry) lion’s savage attack on a bull or goat.\footnote{59}

The most conspicuous features of lion similes in the \textit{Iliad} are recurring and concrete details describing what marauding lions \textit{do}: they snatch up goats and carry them away in their jaws (\textit{Il.} 13.197-202), leap on an ox in a fleeing herd and drag him to the ground (\textit{Il.} 15.630-38), fight over a deer carcass (\textit{Il.} 16.755-61), fight over a watering hole (\textit{Il.} 16.822-28), whirl around when wounded and come back in a rage (\textit{Il.} 5.136-43), and protect their young by attacking anyone who threatens them (\textit{Il.} 17.132-37). Lions in similes harass flocks and herders until they kill something to eat, are beaten back, or are killed in the effort (\textit{Il.} 12.298-308; 3.550-60) They are strong, quick, deadly in aim, relentless hunters and marauders, and often hungry (\textit{Il.} 1.113-21, 548-54). They overpower both the weak and the strong by sheer force (biē, \textit{Il.} 24.42 and 16.826). When finally forced to back down, lions pace in front of the steading or sink away (\textit{Il.} 18.161-64, 17.656-65); either way, they have no alternate plan. Iliadic lions are not among the animals that use deceit;\footnote{60} they exercise no self-restraint. The lions’ most characteristic feature in similes is that they eat their prey, gulping down blood and guts and covering their maws in gore.\footnote{61} More to the point, they are ὀμοφαγοὶ; they eat raw meat, which humans by definition must never do.\footnote{62} Hence they are inherently transgressive and ambiguous. As a result, even honorific comparisons bear a latent but profound ambivalence.

We may infer that the cumulative effect, or basic association of ideas, of the lion simile system consists in the Greek cultural concept of biē—raw, natural force expressed in heroic, savage, and outrageous acts and in powerful emotions. In Greek mythic and poetic traditions, biē is closely aligned with nature. Biē and nature, like the culture hero himself, are necessary to human life and society but, at the same time, always threaten to degenerate into unremitting violence and, ultimately, to destroy the bonds of family and friendship and the hierarchies that define culture (which, in a Greek context, amounts to Greek culture).\footnote{63} The simile system thus

\footnote{59} Although it is generally thought that lions roamed parts of northern Greece until the 16th century, almost no evidence of their habitation has come to light other than literary anecdote and iconography. It is therefore not clear whether or not archaic Greek farmers and herders had regular encounters with marauding lions. See Warren (1979)123 n.29.

\footnote{60} For detailed discussion of animals that demonstrate \textit{mētis}, see Detienne and Vernant (1978) 27-54.

\footnote{61} Explicitly at \textit{Il}, 3.21-28; 11.170-78, 478-84; 15.630-38; 17.61-69, 540-42; 34.40-45; implicitly at 5.159-65, 550-60; 10.482-88; 11.113-21; 12.298-308; and 13.197-202.

\footnote{62} \textit{Il}, 5.780-83; 7.255-57; and 15.592-93.

\footnote{63} For extensive discussion of nature and culture in the \textit{Iliad}, I refer the reader to Redfield (1994) especially 160-223. Redfield’s work is in many respects compatible with my own and anticipates some of my conclusions. I depart, however, from his contention (183) that the \textit{Iliad} identifies man in nature (or nature in man) with impurity consisting in absence of civilizing limits and, further, that there is no common world, or culture, on the battlefield by which a limit to the killing can be created (203; cf. Wilson [2002] 13-39). Hektor’s offer of a settlement and Priam’s offer of ransom seem to vitiate the later, since the offers are
accomplishes multiple functions economically: with as little as the words “like a lion,” león hos, the poet can evoke an extensive cultural-traditional system of associated concepts and a fund of concrete and emotive detail. This Homer does effectively in a sequence of similes that punctuate and comment on the narrative of the return of the hero in the Iliad and the Odyssey.

In Achilleus’ aristeia, a lion simile marks each turning point in his revenge and the ransom of Hektor: Achilleus’ mourning over Patroklos and his promise to take revenge (II. 18.316-22), the beginning of his aristeia (II. 20.164-74), killing Hektor (II. 22.260-67), exacting such extraordinary revenge that the gods intervene (II. 24.41-43), and ransom Hektor (II. 24.572). The first occurs shortly after the Achaians recover Patroklos’ body and spend the night grieving, led by Achilleus (II. 18.316-22):64

Achilleus is said to grieve like an anguished (akhnutai) lion whose cubs have been stolen and who sets out at once to take revenge on the man who did it. Achilleus’ anguished indignation (akhos, related to the verb used for the lion) is in fact one of the structuring themes of the Iliad (see II. 18.78-126).65 It brings him back into battle to exact revenge for Patroklos by killing Hektor, which he knows will lead inevitably to his own death. The lion’s akhos echoes that of Achilleus in Book 18; the revenge the lion sets out to take anticipates that which Achilleus promises the dead Patroklos in the lines immediately following the simile. Moreover, Achilleus’ alignment with the lion through the simile constitutes latent association with ambiguous biē, even in the absence of an overt act of violence or mention of raging fury.

64. Translations of Homer are those of Lattimore (1951 and 1967), but with adjustments.
65. See also Nagy (1979) 69-93.
The beginning of Achilles’ *aristeia* is also set off by an extended lion simile that describes in vivid detail a wounded lion’s response to pain and threat (*Il. 20.164-74*). Honorific as the simile may be, the imagery explicitly portrays increasingly violent aspects of the lion simile system:

*Πηλείδης δ’ ἐτέρωθεν ἐναυτόν ὅρτο λέων ὡς σίντης, ὅν τε καὶ ἄνδρες ἀποκτάμεναι μεμάζοιν ἀγρόμενοι πάς δήμος· ὃ δὲ πρῶτον μὲν ἀτίξων ἔρχεται, ἀλλ’ ὅτε κέν τις ἁρπαγῶν αἰζηνὸν δουρὶ βάλῃ ἐάλῃ τε χανῶν, περὶ τ’ ἀφρός ὀδόντας γιγνεται, ἐν δὲ τε σι κραδίν στέιν ἄλκιμον ἤτορ, σωφρ δὲ πλειράς τε καὶ ιαχία ἀμφότερον μαστίσαται, ἐξ δ’ αὐτὸν ἐπιτρύνει μαχέασθαι, γλαυκίσων δ’ ίθις φέρεται μένει, ἢν τινα πέφη ἄνδρων, ἢ αὐτός φθίεται πρῶτος ἐν ὑμίλω ὡς Ἀχιλή. ὅτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμός ἀγήμορ.

(*Il. 20.164-74*)

From the other side the son of Peleus rose like a lion against him, the baleful beast, when men have been straining to kill him, the county all in the hunt, and he at the first pays them no attention, but goes his way, only when some one of the impetuous young men has hit him with the spear he whirls, jaws open, over his teeth foam breaks out, and in the depth of his chest the powerful heart groans; he lashes his own ribs with his tail and the flanks on both sides as he rouses himself to fury for the fight, eyes glaring and hurls himself straight onward on the chance of killing some one of the men, or else being killed himself in the first onrush. So the proud heart and fighting fury stirred on Achilles.

In the final moments of the duel with Achilles, Hektor is compelled to turn and face him. He proposes a settlement: the two of them should agree that the winner in the duel would not mutilate the other’s body (*Il. 22.260-67*). Achilles responds with his own grim lion simile:

*Τέν δ’ ἄρ’ ὑπόδρα ιδίων προσέφη πόδας ὡκὺς Ὀχιλέας· Ἄκτορ μή μοι ἀλαστε συνημοσύνας· ἀγάρεως· ἡς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὀρκία πιστά, οὐδέ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὀμφρόνα θυμὸν ἠχούσιν, ἀλλὰ κακά φρουέοις διαμπερές ἀλλήλοισιν, ὡς οὐκ ἔστ’ ἐμὲ καὶ σε φιλήμεναι, οὐδέ τι νοῶν ὀρκία ἑσούσιν, πρὶν γ’ ἢ ἐτέρων γε πεσόντα αἰματός ἄσαι Ἀρης ταλαιπώρουν πολεμιστήν.

(*Il. 22.260-67*)

Then looking darkly at him swift-footed Achilles answered, ‘Hektor, I cannot forget what you have done, argue me no agreements. As there are no trustworthy oaths between men and lions, nor wolves and lambs have spirit that can be brought to agreement but forever these hold feelings of hate for each other, so there can be no friendship between you and me, nor shall there be
oaths between us, but one or the other must fall before then
to glut with his blood Ares the god who fights under the shield’s guard.

Insofar as the lion simile is associated with the traditional thematics of biē, this simile reproduces the opposition between nature and culture. To the extent that humans maintain bonds among themselves by means of settlements and agreements, the realm of (Greek) culture is characterized by displacement of violence, or biē, and, consequently, by social order. In that representatives of biē and nature, lions and wolves, are ὀμοφάγοι, eaters of raw meat, nature is here characterized by nondisplacement of violence leading inevitably to dissolution of civilized order. Achilles aligns himself explicitly with lions and wolves, that is, with nature as opposed to culture. Although he thus isolates himself from the human community, it is also true that here Achilles pursues an inordinate extension of what all the other elite warriors can be seen to do from the time that Agamemnon rejects Chryses’ ransom for his daughter in Iliad 1. In the primary fabula between Chryses’ arrival in the Achaian camp and Priam’s arrival at Achilles’ hut, no offers of ransom, pleas for mercy, or material settlements are successful.

Moreover, the Iliad constructs a thematic nexus of uncivilized behaviors associated with ambiguous biē, a negation of culture that dissolves even family bonds: rejecting material compensation in favor of extraordinary revenge (tisis), neglecting the welfare of one’s own family or city, and expressing a wish to eat one’s enemy raw. Hera and Hekabē are the only characters besides Achilles who are implicated in this pattern, which the poem arguably genders as feminine (II. 4.25-56 and 24.200-16): Hera, when she arranges to give Zeus three of her own cities in exchange for the destruction of Troy, and Hekabē, when she tries to prevent Priam from taking ransom to gain the release of Hektor’s corpse. Achilles will shortly entangle himself in this pattern, as well.

Having failed to negotiate a mutual agreement with Achilles, Hektor as he is dying pleads with him not to allow the dogs to mutilate his body but to return his corpse in exchange for ransom (II. 22.337-43). Achilles wishes instead that his fury (menos) and heart (thumos) would allow him to “hack [Hektor’s] meat away and eat it raw” for the things Hektor had done to him (II. 22.346-48). The personal and cosmic implications of his wish are staggering. Omophagy (eating raw meat) is conceived of as proper to beasts, like lions, but not to humans, who eat the cooked meat of sacrifice commensally. Since commensality defines the political order, a formalized

66. See also Redfield (1994) 183.
67. Wolves, also, are said to eat their prey; E. 16.156-57.
relationship with one who commits omophagy is impossible.69 However, as Erwin Cook shows, even the wish to commit omophagy attests that one has already descended below the boundaries of the human to a state of bestiality.70 The lion simile is in danger of imploding, for in expressing the wish to eat Hektor raw, Achilleus wavers between being “like” a lion and actually transgressing the boundary between human and beast. He is thus represented as posing a palpable threat to social and cosmic order.

After killing Hektor, Achilleus presides over the funeral games for Patroklos—a stunning exhibit of culture and social order based on elite competition. But he is also shown dragging Hektor’s corpse around Patroklos’ funeral mound and then leaving it face down in the dust in an unabating attempt to exact yet more revenge. Apollo rebukes the Olympians for not returning Hektor’s body to his family for funeral rites and he instigates divine intervention. The poet has Apollo use a lion simile that recalls Achilleus’ own wish to commit omophagy (II. 24.41-43):

\[
\text{λέων δ' ὣς ἄγρια οἶδεν,}
\text{ὅς τ' ἐπὶ ἀρ μεγάλῃ τε βίᾳ καὶ ἀγνίνορη θυμῷ}
\text{ἐξας εἰσ' ἐπὶ μῆλα βροτῶν' ἵνα δαίτα λάβησαι·}
\]

He knows wild things, like a lion who when he has given way to his own great biē and his haughty spirit, goes among the flocks of men, to make his meal of them.

Achilleus “knows wild things,” like a lion governed only by his biē, who ranges among the flocks of mortals to make a meal (dais) of them. “Know” and “be” are conflated in the Greek term oiden (24.41). In other words, that Achilleus knows wild things means that he is wild (agrios). Achilleus will brook no settlement, according to Apollo, because he reifies non-displacement; he embodies nature and negative biē. It is impossible to assimilate him into the realm of culture, justice, and the bonds of human kindness (II. 24.39-40). Zeus, however, contests Apollo’s characterization of Achilleus—as, not coincidentally, does the poet—and refuses to bypass him (II. 24.155-58). He instead instructs Achilleus to conclude a settlement, an exchange of ransom, with Priam. Apollo’s angry speech is thus the pivot upon which the ransom of Hektor first turns. Although Achilleus is initially noncommittal, by the time Priam arrives with the ransom, Achilleus asserts that he himself had decided to release Hektor’s body (II. 24.560-61).

This brings us to the last lion simile in the sequence and the only one in the Iliad explicitly set in a house (II. 24.572-79). As soon as Priam arrives at Achilleus’ hut, he supplicates him and begs him to think of his own father,
Peleus. Achilleus, moved to pity, weeps for his father and friend alongside the old king weeping for his son. Nonetheless, when Priam tries to press him about releasing Hektor’s body, Achilleus’ temper flares. The old man, fearful, sits down as Achilleus had instructed him. The lion simile that follows introduces a new episode in which Achilleus goes out of doors to oversee unloading the ransom from the cart and preparing Hektor’s body for return (Il. 24.572-79):

The son of Peleus bounded to the door of the house like a lion nor went alone, but the two henchmen followed attending, the hero Automedon and Alkimos, those whom Achilleus honoured beyond all companions after Patroklos dead. These two now set free from under the yoke the mules and the horses, and led inside the herald, the old king’s crier, and gave him a chair to sit in, then from the well-wheeled mule wagon lifted out the unlimited ransom for the head of Hektor.

Previous scholarship has regarded this simile as problematic. Some dismiss it as a so-called isolated simile, a lion signifying nothing. Critics have, alternatively, proposed that it marks the end of the previous episode, in the belief that it refers more naturally to the preceding scene where Achilleus’ anger flares up. However, the phrase leōn hōs, like a lion, belongs syntactically with the episode that line 572 introduces. The simile propels the narrative forward: Achilleus moves like a lion toward the door of the house, and not alone.

Whereas Apollo had said that Achilleus could only take his meal, or portion (dais), like a beast, by yielding to bié and lunging after the flocks, he in fact takes it by charging like a lion after the fabrics, tripods, and other luxury items on the cart. The goods are described as ransom (apoina), which, in the Iliad, comprises prestige goods offered in exchange for the return of a son or daughter who has been captured or enslaved. Since the captive embodies the timē, status or honor, won by the captor, ransom compensates the warrior so that he can release the captive without incurring a loss of timē. Inasmuch as Iliadic warriors are under no compulsion to accept material

71. For the term, see Clarke (1995) 139.
compensation, willingness to do so is implicitly reckoned as an act of self-restraint. Conversely, unwillingness to accept material settlements or exacting extraordinary revenge is figured in the poem as bië and associated in pivotal episodes with lion similes. We may infer that the poem aligns self-restraint with displacement of ambiguous bië through material settlements, and hence with culture and social order in opposition to unremitting bië, non-displacement, nature, and disorder. The lion simile associated with the ransom of Hektor, when considered in light of the sequence of lion similes attaching to Achilleus and the thematics of compensation, emerges clearly as an instantiation of the coordinated system of lion similes. That is, it evokes by metonymy the system of lion simile details and the concept of bië, but it represents, as perhaps nothing less incongruous could, bië and nature appropriated for culture through the exercise of self-restraint. The poem neither consigns the hero to the realm of nature nor purifies him of the nature within, but assimilates nature and the hero into culture by constructing him as mediator of the opposition.\(^{73}\) The incongruity of the image derives from the immediacy of displacement, for if the exchange of goods substitutes for violent conflict, the same simile system can be employed for both. In this way the Iliad appropriates traditional lion imagery and the culture-hero type, which Herakles "the lion-hearted" emblematizes, and at the same time departs from the type by integrating bië and self-restraint in its own epic hero. In the final analysis, the Iliadic lion, Achilleus, embodies heroic bië tempered by heroic self-restraint.

We turn now to the Odyssey's six attacking lion similes. In all but one, Odysseus is the object of comparison. The Odyssean lion similes present a collocation of details similar to those in the Iliad. Unlike Iliadic lion similes, however, only one of the Odyssean similes is not set in a house or other dwelling (6.127-36), though it is located in a domestic setting—the place for laundering clothing. The cumulative effect is nonetheless an inherent quality of bië, which comprises both negative and positive aspects. Lion similes in the Odyssey, like those referring to Achilleus in the Iliad, may be associated with the thematics of material exchange and revenge. Moreover, a pattern of development is discernible in which lion similes mark significant moments in the narrative of Odysseus' reincorporation into his household.\(^{74}\)

The first lion simile occurs in Menelaos' speech when he replies to Telemachos' description of the suitors' violent and rapacious conduct in his house. Menelaos uses the simile to express his hope that Odysseus will return and take revenge on the suitors. Telemachos in turn repeats the simile to his

\(^{73}\) The model for this reading owes to Cook (1995).

\(^{74}\) Magrath (1982) observes a pattern of increasing violence in lion similes in the Odyssey.
mother, Penelope, after he comes back from his voyage and stay with Odysseus in Eumaios' hut (Od. 4.335-40=17.126-31):

As when a doe has brought her fawns to the lair of a lion and put them there to sleep, they are newborn and still suckling, then wanders out into the foothills and the grassy corners, grazing there, but now the lion comes back to his own lair and visits a shameful destruction on both mother and children; so Odysseus will visit shameful destruction on these men.

The simile could be described with equal precision as a deer in the lair simile or a lion simile. The first point of contact is between the suitors and the fawns sleeping in a lion’s den. The resumptive clause compares Odysseus to the lion who comes home and kills the doe and her fawns. The lion represents biē, like his Iliadic counterpart. The negative aspects are latent, however, as the description of the slaughter is abstract and contains no vivid details about what the lion does to the fawns and doe. He is not a marauding lion who robs the herder’s steading—a role more fitting for the suitors—but one who comes upon deer in his lair. In fact, we may read the simile as putting the burden for their destruction as much upon the foolish deer as upon the lion. Stephanie West remarks on the “bizarre” development of the simile and its incredible situation (since deer have a keen sense of smell and an instinctive fear of lions). Whether or not the details conform to real life, the poet has composed the simile using details familiar from other lion similes, and has conformed them to the narrative context of the Odyssey’s prologue: people suffer for their own reckless deeds (atasthaliai, Od. 1.32-43).

The next simile appears in Book 6, when Odysseus awakens on Scheria to the sounds of young girls playing. He does not know whether he has come to a land of violent and savage people (characterized by biē) or hospitable ones (representatives of culture) (Od. 6.119-26). Since he is naked, Odysseus covers his genitals with a leafy branch and steps out of his cover like a lion (Od. 6.130-34):

βῆ δ᾽ ἔμεν ὡς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος, ἀλκὶ πεποιθῶς.
ὅς τ᾽ εἰσ᾽ ύσμενος καὶ ἀθέμενος, ἐν δὲ οἱ δασα

75. Heubeck at 4.335-40.
76. Cf. Il. 11.113-19, a simile in which a lion is said to snatch young deer by going into their lair.
The image of a brine-encrusted man in a state of undress descending with violent intent on a group of young girls, and covering himself all the while with a leaf, is undeniably humorous. Justin Glenn points out the erotic overtones implied by the lion’s blazing eyes (a common element of erotic passion in Greek poetry) and his urgent appetite. He suggests that the scene comprises a mock-heroic episode and Odysseus’ last temptation. Erwin Cook further clarifies the nuance of the episode: Odysseus’ strategy is not unheroic but an expression of the passive aspect of the hero, which consists in self-restraint.

The seeming dislocation of the lion simile has attracted considerable scholarly debate, which I will not summarize here. I propose, however, that in this case a dislocating effect could only serve the emotive force of the simile by simulating in the audience Odysseus’ own momentary disorientation. Although he is described as rain-battered and wind-blown, this blazing-eyed marauding lion who strikes terror in those who come across his path is familiar from the Iliadic system (cf. II. 12.299-305). The simile evokes the more violent aspects of nature and biē, as the lion’s hunger urges him to kill and eat. I am thus not persuaded by attempts to depict this lion as whipped and passive in contrast to the Iliadic one. In fact, as Cook points out, the simile is deployed precisely to evoke Iliadic heroism, only to reject it as inappropriate. He observes that Nausikaa is the one who poses the threat to Odysseus, since his survival and return depend on winning her over. On this view, Odysseus must not adopt the strategy of Iliadic heroism—lack of restraint or biē—inherent in the simile, but its opposite, self-restraint. Thus if Odyssean tradition knows of the tour de force concluding lion simile in Iliadic tradition, the Odyssey here not only defines its own heroism against...

78. Cook (1999) 158; cf. for example Magrath (1982) 208, who describes the reference to the belly as “unheroic coarseness.”
79. I refer the reader to Glenn (1998) for a bibliographical review.
80. See, for example, Friedrich (1981) 121-23.
83. See again Cook (1999) 158.
Iliadic, but attempts to redefine Iliadic heroism against the *Iliad*’s own construction.

The third lion simile in the sequence refers not to Odysseus but to Polyphemos (*Od. 9.288-93*). Odysseus participates in the episode, but in the passive role of a potential victim of the marauding lion and not that of the lion itself.

Faced with a monstrous creature who refuses to formalize relations with a material exchange, embodies nature and is characterized by unmitigated *biê*, Odysseus is again forced to adopt a passive strategy of self-restraint and active strategies of guile (*dolos*) to ensure his own survival and homecoming (*nostos*).

After the contest of the bow, Odysseus shoots an arrow through Antinoos’ throat and identifies himself to the suitors. Then follows the slaughter, which is figured as an *aristeia* and takes up Book 22. The culminating lion simile in the sequence marks the conclusion of the *mnesterophonia* (slaughter of the suitors). When Telemachos brings Eurykleia back into the dining hall, she catches sight of a gore-spattered Odysseus, sitting among the bodies of the men he has slain and glutted with his intemperate revenge like a lion glutted with blood and flesh (*Od. 22.401-06; 23.48-22.402)*:

There she found Odysseus among the slaughtered dead men, spattered over with gore and battle filth, like a lion who has been feeding on an ox of the fields, and goes off...
covered with blood, all his chest and his flanks on either side bloody, a terrible thing to look in the face; so now Odysseus’ feet and the hands above them were spattered.

As William Magrath points out, no two scenes in the *Odyssey* are “as closely associated by defilement of flesh and blood, meat and wine, as those containing the banquet hall carnage created by Polyphemos and Odysseus.”

The almost uncompromising *bie* that Odysseus unleashes in his *aristeia* against his own people assimilates him dangerously, and no less than Achilleus, to the realm of nondisplacement, nature, and disorder. Although in the lines immediately following the lion simile in *Odyssey* 22, Odysseus prevents Eurykleia from indulging in an Iliadic vaunt over the slain suitors (*Od.* 22.407-12), neither the simile nor the *mnesterophonia* evinces a modicum of self-restraint. The suitor Eurymachos, for instance, pleads with Odysseus to show mercy. He admits that the suitors’ rapacity constitutes reckless deeds (*atasthaliai, Od.* 22.47) but contends that Odysseus should spare the remaining suitors since he had already killed Antinoös, the person “responsible for all of it.” Eurymachos further promises that, if Odysseus will save his own people, they will compensate him publicly and pay him back (*apodósomen, 22.58*) in gold and silver the *timé* (value, price, honor) for all they had eaten and drunk in his house. Odysseus refuses in words reminiscent of Achilleus’ refusals of Agamemnon’s and Hektor’s ransom. He says that even if the suitors paid everything they had and more as compensation in goods (*apodoite, 22.61*), he still would not restrain himself from slaughtering them until they paid back (*apotisai, 22.64*, cf. 5.23-24) their transgression (*huperbasien, 22.64*) in the currency of their lives. Odysseus invokes the theodicy articulated in the prologue (*Od.* 1.32-43) to claim moral authority for his extraordinary revenge: the suitors have only suffered punishment for their own reckless deeds (*atasthaliai*). Nonetheless, in that Odysseus turns down an offer of compensation for harm he has incurred, he surpasses even Achilleus in violence. Indeed, in the *mnesterophonia*, he surpasses Achilleus in Iliadic heroism.

The Epic Mirror

*We have seen that* developed sequences of lion similes describing the hero of each epic run parallel to and comment on the narrative. Each sequence culminates with a lion in the house: the Iliadic simile renders Achilleus’ house a realm of culture brought to bear on the battlefield, the realm of *bie*.

84. Magrath (1982) 211.
85. For discussion, see Haubold (2000) 47-144.
86. For the view that Eurymachos is negotiating [unacceptable] terms of surrender, see Marks (2001) ch. 3§8.
and nature; the Odyssean one brings nature within culture by turning the house into a battlefield. Moreover, the ransom of Hektor and the slaughter of the suitors both involve ransom or revenge, which the hero takes like a lion. The Iliad figures Achilleus’ ransom as reciprocal exchange, while the Odyssey depicts Odysseus’ revenge as divinely sanctioned punishment for reckless deeds (atathaliai). Achilleus, whose aristeia was characterized by an escalating spiral of bie, takes the ransom as an act of self-restraint. Odysseus, whose survival and return depend on passive strategies of endurance and self-restraint together with active strategies of guile (doloi), takes revenge in an act of almost unparalleled bie. Thus, the two sequences with their culminating scenes mirror one another. In fact, each hero seems to have returned from his wrath or wandering as his opposite and, thus, as a mirror image of the other.

It is a commonplace that the Iliad and the Odyssey are complementary in many respects and, at the same time, present marked contrasts in their poetics, heroism, cosmology, and concepts of justice. Concepts of heroism in the Iliad and the Odyssey are usually conceived of as studies in thematic opposition: fame for young death (kleos) versus survival and return (nostos), natural force (bie) versus cunning intelligence (metis), traditional heroism versus an unheroic or antiheroic ideal. Such readings are justified in general by a tendency widely attested in archaic Greek thought to view reality and to construct relations in terms of hierarchical antitheses—such as male/female and culture/nature—and, more specifically, by the dominant motifs in each poem. The opposition between metis and bie is in fact deeply imbedded in archaic Greek mythic and poetic traditions. It is closely related to an opposition between culture and nature, so that representatives of metis are aligned with culture and social order, and representatives of bie with nature and disorder. That much said, archaic Greeks invested the terms of the polarities with so much ambiguity and so rich a texture that they may not be reduced to universal or absolute types. The Greeks negotiated the tensions between the polarities more often by means of mediators—who move freely between realms or embody both terms of an opposition—than by pairs of absolute opposites. Hence, we would not expect to find an unremitting polarity between the Iliad and the Odyssey or between their epic heroes. The foregoing analysis of the lion similes in relation to Achilleus and Odysseus has shown that both heroes mediate between nature and culture and, further, between bie and its cultural opposite, in distinctive and complex ways.

87. On active and passive heroics in the Odyssey, see Cook (1999).
88. On metis and bie as traditional epic themes that inform Greek concepts of the hero, see Nagy (1979) ch. 20 and passim. Cook (1995) shows that the opposition between metis and bie organizes the Odyssey at every level of the composition.
Inasmuch as the cultural opposite of *biē* is in Homer sometimes trickery and deceit and at other times self-restraint, the traditional definition of *mētis* as *dolos*, guile, is arguably too limited to account for the *biē*-mētis opposition. Erwin Cook has made a convincing case that the *Odyssey* figures restraint as an aspect of *mētis*. On this view *mētis*, which consists in subordinating physical drives and *biē* to intelligence, may be exercised actively, as *dolos*, deceit, or passively, as endurance and restraint. It is surely no coincidence that in the *Iliad* when Athene, goddess of *mētis*, intercepts Achilleus as he is about to kill Agamemnon with his sword, she counsels restraint and deferred gratification as a way of earning more gifts without resorting to violence (*Il.* 1.188-214). Similarly, Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant describe the man of *mētis* in Greek culture and society as the one who, compared with his opponent, exercises “vigilant premeditation” and “continuous concentration on an activity,” and further, “anchors [his] mind securely in the project which it has devised in advance thanks to [his] ability to look beyond the immediate present and foresee a more or less wide slice of the future.” *Mētis* is at least more multifaceted than trickery alone. We may thus infer that self-restraint is an aspect of *mētis* in opposition to *biē*, without taking the additional step of equating the two or abolishing the important thematic differences between Achilleus and Odysseus. Consequently, we may say that Achilleus and Odysseus are each constructed in their own epic traditions as lion-hearted culture heroes who mediate between the cultural polarities of *mētis* and *biē*. Moreover, the event in which each hero’s “opposite” quality is integrated, the ransom of Hektor in the *Iliad* and the slaughter of the suitors in the *Odyssey*, is highlighted emotively and thematically by the culmination of a sequence of lion similes. The two scenes seem on the surface to have little in common and thus do not ordinarily invite comparison. Yet they overlap in narrative location in their respective epic traditions.

Since a Withdrawal, Devastation, and Return (WR) pattern organizes the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, it should be possible to map the narrative placement of the ransom of Hektor and the slaughter of the suitors in relation to it. The WR story pattern may include a number of typical elements, such as hospitality to the wandering hero and disguise of the hero upon his return. The fundamental elements, however, are first, the withdrawal or absence of a

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89. The ruse of the wooden horse, for example, depended not only upon Odysseus’ craftiness, but on his endurance and self-restraint when Helen called out to the men hidden inside (see *Od.* 4.265-89).
93. The model for this reading derives from Cook (1995).
powerful figure, secondly, the devastation suffered by the hero’s friends or community in his or her absence, and thirdly, the return of the hero. In Homeric epic, the hero’s return has two aspects, personal and social. The social aspect of the return is the hero’s reconstitution of the larger community. In the personal aspect, the hero reintegrates into a community of family or friends and resolves a crisis of order. Moreover, personal reintegration is twofold: reintegration of the heroic self and reintegration of the returning hero into a community of family or friends (philoi). 95

On this view, the Funeral Games for Patroklos and the settlement between Odysseus’ household and the Ithakans comprise the social returns of Achilleus and Odysseus. Thus the ransom of Hektor and the slaughter of the suitors together with Odysseus’ reunion with Penelope constitute the personal returns. 96 Odysseus kills the suitors in order to reintegrate into his household as husband and father and thereby restore its order. Achilleus accepts a reciprocal exchange and, in so doing, reenters the timê (honor)-based status system of heroic society and averts the disorder of undisplaced violence. In his personal reintegration, each hero exercises the “other” aspect of his heroic identity—Achilleus métis and Odysseus biê—and is thus restored to his full heroic identity comprising both métis and biê. If this argument stands, Iliad 24 corresponds to Odyssey 22/23 as the narrative of the hero’s personal return, and Iliad 23 to Odyssey 24 as a narrative of the social return. The endings of the two poems mirror each other structurally—in the Iliad the social return is followed by the personal, and in the Odyssey the personal by the social—as the two heroes mirror each other thematically. The difference between Achilleus’ ransom and Odysseus’ morally authenticated revenge as modes of reintegration is significant and may be considered in light of the withdrawals, devastations, and social returns in each poem.

Book 1 of the Iliad recounts the strife (eris) between Achilleus and Agamemnon that precipitated Achilleus’ withdrawal from the fighting. The quarrel arises from a contradiction in a social organization that contains a fixed system, in which Agamemnon can legitimate his political preeminence over the Greek armies as a scepter-bearing king, and a fluid timê-based system, in which elite warriors compete for status in relation to each other, and in which Achilleus can legitimately claim to be the best of the Achaians (cf. II.1.149–71). Previous scholarship has shown that, according to Iliadic cosmology, conflict in the human realm is a result of the primeval displacement of eris, strife, from the divine to the human spheres. 97 When

96. See also Cook (1995) especially ch. 5; and Wilson (2002) ch. 6.
appropriately displaced through the ritualized conflict of elite competition, *eris*, which emerges as competition for dominance, is a good thing insofar as it imposes a hierarchy that produces a natural leader and a well-ordered society. When *eris* is not so displaced, it can lead only to eruptions of violence and, ultimately, to social and cosmic disorder. Strategies for displacing *eris* are aligned with culture and *mètis*; nondisplacement, as we have seen, is aligned with nature and *bië*. Achilleus withdraws from the fighting because, in his view (and the narrator’s), Agamemnon in his capacity as scepter-bearing king has disabled the *timè*-based system. As a result Achilleus is unable to rise to his natural position as *aristos*, best, and the mechanisms for displacing *eris* through ritualized conflict are rendered inoperative. In fact, it is possible to read the *Iliad*’s largely negative presentation of Agamemnon as polemic against a system in which leaders are politically authenticated instead of emerging naturally through elite competition. It is surely not coincidental that in the *Iliad*, Odysseus is identified with the ideology of one king authorized by Zeus (*Il. 2.2203-06*)—an ideology that the *Iliad* represents as failing dismally. The devastation created by Achilleus’ absence from the fighting and *timè*-based exchange consists not only in countless deaths incurred in the Achaian rout, but in an impending collapse of order caused by undisplaced violence, embodied most horrifically in Achilleus himself in Book 22. Achilleus’ social return, the reconstitution of heroic society in the Funeral Games (*Il. 23*), is accordingly a reconstitution of freely operating elite competition, or ritualized conflict, with Achilleus, the natural *aristos*, at the helm. Achilleus’ personal return is figured as reentry into the reconstituted *timè*-based system by means of a reciprocal exchange, the ransom of Hektor. He thus brings to an end the escalating *bië* through an act of displacement, which the poem figures as self-restraint and, hence, *mètis*. And he does so “like a lion.”

The expedition to Troy motivates Odysseus’ withdrawal from Ithaka. However, the real concern of the *Odyssey* is his singularly long absence, which Book 1 assigns to Poseidon’s revenge for the blinding of Polyphemos (*Od. 1.65-75*). Negative reciprocal exchange thus causes the king’s withdrawal, his long absence, and indirectly, the disorder in the governance of Ithaka as well as that in Odysseus’ own house. In the king’s absence and upon his return, elite competition (reciprocal exchange) fails as a mechanism for maintaining social order. The suitors’ competition for the hand of Penelope results in chaos in Odysseus’ house, including improper feasting and consumption of his wealth without recompense, which the poem figures as negative *bië*. Odysseus’ personal return, the revenge, is accordingly

98. Cook (1995); see also Marks (2001) ch. 3.
represented not as reciprocal exchange but, in light of the theodicy articulated in the prologue, as morally authorized administration of justice. Even so, the slaughter of the suitors fails to impose lasting order because the suitors’ families perceive the revenge as outrage, lôbê, instead of justice and prepare to retaliate for Odysseus’ revenge with yet more killing (Od. 24.426-435). Civil war is averted only by Zeus’ fiat (Od. 24.537-48). In the final settlement and reconstitution of Ithakan society, Zeus authorizes Odysseus to rule as king always over the Ithakans, who agree to his rule by sworn oaths (Od. 24.481-86). It is not clear that this political solution represents the Odyssey’s ideal society but it promises a society that works, at least for the immediate future. As James Marks points out, however, the oaths and Odysseus’ kingship will fend off eruptions of violence only on the condition of forgetting (eklêsis), “a circumstance that no mortal can achieve.” Although Odysseus’ act of Iliadic heroism, figured as such in part through lion imagery, is necessary, it is not the final answer for Ithakan society. Odysseus himself, however, may be.

In sum, the Iliad and the Odyssey each presents its own epic hero in his social return as a leader of an idealized well-ordered society: Achilleus as the natural leader of a society based on elite competition, and Odysseus as the politically authenticated king in a benevolent monarchy. Each epic constructs its hero as uniquely qualified to lead in this society because he combines in himself the qualities of biê and métis. Achilleus and Odysseus emerge neither as opposites nor as identical, but as mirror images. Put another way, each of the Homeric poems constructs its hero as a culture hero, in part by identifying him with Herakles through lion imagery and a restricted epithet; but both depart from the type by integrating force and intelligence in the hero qua leader of a well-ordered society. These strategies are complemented by a tendency in each epic to present the “other” hero or heroic ideal as non-integrated and, hence, deficient. The Iliad, for example, describes Odysseus as skilled in devices, doloi (II. 3.200-02), but slights his biê perceptibly in the distribution of lion similes and aristeiai. The narrator once depicts him in unflattering terms as the prey of scavengers who is saved only by a scavenging lion (II. 11.473-84); even his métis, dissembling, fails in the embassy to Achilleus (II. 9.312-13). To repeat a point made earlier, Odysseus is further slighted by alignment with Agamemnon and the ideology of the Zeus-appointed king. Achilleus, when he appears in the Odyssey, is ever the warrior; when he imagines himself returning home, it is to defend his father by his might as he had once done for the Argives (Od. 11.494-503). The

100. Again, Marks (2001) ch. 3§8.
Odyssey deploys lion similes, as we have seen, to evoke and critique Iliadic heroism as ambiguous biē.

It is thus possible, and even plausible, that the ransom of Hektor and the slaughter of the suitors, distinguished by their analogous narrative placement and highlighted with the culmination of a sequence of lion similes, could have evoked each other and, to some degree, written each other in performance. There is a conditioned reflex in Homeric scholarship to interpret the relation between the Iliad and the Odyssey by relegating the Iliad to an earlier, more primitive period and assigning the Odyssey to a later and more enlightened one. But if the foregoing is accepted, it seems a more reasonable inference that they were produced and reproduced through reciprocal interaction and in direct relation to changing social realities and social formation in archaic Greece. Richard Seaford argues cogently that the versions of the Iliad and the Odyssey that were eventually textualized prevailed over other forms of themselves because of their endings and, specifically, because their endings embodied so exceptionally the aspirations of the early polis.102 If the returns and reintegration of Achilleus and Odysseus reflect competing social and political concerns in the Homeric audiences about leadership and social formation, the intertextual echoes between them could have been pronounced. Although these historical issues are beyond the scope of this study, we may at least say that in constructing their lion kings, our Iliad and Odyssey confront each other on issues not so different from political discourses that continued into the fifth century.