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Ways to die for warriors

Death Similes in Homer and Quintus of Smyrna

ABSTRACT: “Sometimes there is no other word but ‘beautiful’ to describe the evocation of the death of an otherwise insignificant warrior”. BUXTON (2004, 151–152) refers to a group of similes and comparisons in Homeric death scenes that thus far has not been studied thoroughly. There is an abundance of dying scenes in the Homeric epics, especially in the “Iliad”, and in particular those illustrated by similes and comparisons add significant meaning to the plot. Similes and comparisons have various literary functions and are often used as structuring elements in the narrative. Death similes are used to characterize the victim and aggressor during their fatal confrontation. By extension, they equally provide a characterization of death itself, which can be depicted from different points of view. Death can be seen as a natural part of the cycle of human life or, in the heroic war ideology, as an instrument to win glory.

Many of the typically “Homeric” similes and comparisons used in death scenes have been imitated in later epics. Not only the bare images, but also the deeper message they can imply is often transferred to its new context. This paper describes the occurrence of death similes in the “Iliad” and “Odyssey” as a foundation for its reception in the “Posthomerica” of Quintus of Smyrna. This 3rd century AD epic provides a clear example of Homeric imitatio and aemulatio. Quintus’ typically Homeric style includes an abundant use of Homeric similes, also in dying scenes. In fact, similes prove to be even more frequently used for this purpose in the Posthomerica than in the Homeric epics.

This study analyses Quintus’ rich reception of the Homeric death simile and its effects on the narrative structures of the Posthomerica. Although obviously inspired by Homer, Quintus’ use of death similes is further elaborated to support the plot by means of a linearly evolving characterization of both death and its aggressors and victims. This study therefore proposes an interpretation of the Posthomerica as an original literary composition.

1. Death Simile: A Definition and Classification**1.1 Terminology**

The study of death imagery covers a wide range of similes and comparisons in the Homeric epics and the “Posthomerica”. Hence, a well-delineated corpus and clear definitions of the applied terminology are important. The widespread terminological

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distinction between the Homeric “simile” and “comparison” is of minor importance for this analysis. The definition of these notions is mainly based on their length (EDWARDS 1990, 31). Whereas an extended simile usually covers several verses and has its own conjugated verb, a short comparison lacks this independent structure. This paper maintains the conventional terminology as far as formal characteristics are concerned. However, at the level of content, the distinction may prove less relevant, as SCOTT states, “the difference between long and short similes is not as important as some have thought. The choice is aesthetic: a short simile can add a degree of emphasis to the narrative without injecting the full weight of an expanded simile into a passage” (2009, 39). The fact that the same “comparantia” can occur both in short comparisons and in extended similes proves the strong connection between these two forms of imagery. Hence, the following, content-based case studies treat both types together.

The list of death similes used for this study is derived from a complete database of the similes and comparisons in the Homeric epics and the “Posthomerica”, and contains all extended and short images that occur in dying scenes. Thus, a “death simile” can be defined as a simile or comparison that implies “death” in its comparandum. However, the selected cases do not always have a comparans showing death (and vice versa: not every comparans about death occurs in a “death simile”), neither is the focus of the tertium comparationis always explicitly the “dying” of the victim. This last element must be treated with care. It is difficult to objectively define the common ground between the comparans and the comparandum. The only clear indications are the verbs that introduce and conclude the extended simile, or the main verb that occurs in the phrase of the short comparison. Further interpretative assumptions must be well founded and are always explicated in this paper.

1.2 General Characteristics

The “Iliad” contains the most well-known examples of death similes and is the main model for Quintus’ adaptation. Due to its different plot structure and content, the “Odyssey” is a less representative source of imagery and will be considered in less detail². In the “Iliad”, 33 out of 431 Homeric similes and comparisons can be labelled as death similes, which is a rather low percentage³. Altogether, the Homeric variety in

1 The word “comparandum” is used for the element in the narrative that is described with a simile, “comparans” for the image it is compared to; and “tertium comparationis” for the common ground between these two.

2 In general, the use of Homeric similes and comparisons in the “Odyssey” considerably differs from the Iliad. This is reflected in the statistics: in total, there are only 216 similes and comparisons in the “Odyssey”, fourteen of which can be categorized as death similes.

3 IV 462, IV 482–489, V 161–164, V 487, V 554–559, V 560, VI 146–149, VIII 306–308, XI 113–121, XI 147, XI 172–178, XII 385, XIII 178–182, XIII 204, XIII 389–393, XIII 571–573, XIII 654–655, XIV 414–418, XIV 499–500, XVI 404–410, XVI 482–486, XVI 487–491, XVI 742, XVI 751–754, XVI 823–828, XVII 53–60, XVII 61–69, XVII 520–524, XX 403–406, XXI 12–16, XXI 282–283, XXI 464, XXII 125.

content and focus of death similes appears to be wide, but still some general features can be pointed out.

By definition, the comparandum of death similes is always the same: the death of a person. Hence, the victim is always mentioned as a part of the comparandum. This dying character is most often, as BUXTON describes, “an otherwise insignificant warrior”, whose death is highlighted in one simile. Important heroes who die, on the other hand, get no death similes, with one exception in the case of Patroclus (“Iliad” XVI 751–754). Further, epic protagonists such as Hector or Achilles only figure in death similes as the killer. However, the attacker is not always mentioned in the comparans.

The tertium comparationis of death similes, as determined by the verbs in the text, is variable. A wide range of actions about causing or meeting death can be expressed: the victim is described as passively “falling”, “dying” or “being killed”, while the killer actively “kills”, “slays” or “tears down”. Other than these verbs⁴, it is difficult to determine an “objective” tertium comparationis for death similes, but further interpretations are possible and must be individually investigated for each case.

The various comparantia of death similes can be categorized in a few general groups. Most well-known are the vegetative comparantia describing a victim as a falling tree or a flower. Another important category consists of animal comparantia like cattle, deer or a lion that are confronted with other animals or with humans. Finally, there are a few images of non-living objects and humans that do not fit into either of these categories. Below, the features of each group are described in more detail. The three categories each show death from a different point of view.

1.3 Homeric Death Similes: Three Categories of Comparantia

The first category contains vegetative comparantia, mostly of trees. The image of a falling tree is only used for death similes in the “Iliad” and has thus become a typical comparans for this context⁵. Interestingly, it never occurs in the “Odyssey”. A variant of the tree similes in the “Iliad” is the comparans of a poppy that bends down like the head of the deceased⁶. Seven death similes in the “Iliad” use the image of a falling tree⁷. The general structure of these similes is as follows: “person A falls like tree B”, often expanded by a description of the environment or the circumstances in which this happens, as in this example:⁸

4 Some frequently recurring verbs include: (κατα)πίπτω, ἀσπαίρω, (κατ)ἐρείπω, θείνω, δαμάζω.

5 The tree comparans only seldom occurs in similes without a death context, and then mostly in comparisons. There is one interesting exception in “Iliad” XIV 414–418, where Hector is struck by the deadly blow of a stone and falls down like an oak hit by lightning. Due to this typical death comparans, the reader expects the worst for the Trojan hero. Only, Hector is later on saved by a godly force. The theme of the death simile is here used to create suspense in the story, by anticipating the reaction of the audience and creating an unexpected outcome (JANKO 1992, 214–217).

6 For example in “Iliad” VIII 306–308.

7 “Iliad” IV 482–489, V 560, XIII 178–182, XIII 389–393, XIV 414–418, XVI 482–486 and XVII 53–60.

8 The “Iliad” translation is by the hand of MURRAY, revised by WYATT (1999).

(...) δ δ' ἐν κονίησι χαμαὶ πέσεν αἴγειρος ὡς ἢ ῥά τ' ἐν εἰαμενῇ ἔλεος μέγαλοιο πεφύκει λείη, ἀτάρ τέ οἱ ὄζοι ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῃ πεφύασι· τὴν μὲν θ' ἄρματοπηγὸς ἀνὴρ αἰθωνὶ σιδήρῳ ἐξέταμ', ὄφρα ἴτυν κάμψῃ περικαλλεῖ δίφρῳ· ἢ μὲν τ' ἀζομένη κείται ποταμοῖο παρ' ὄχθας· τοῖον ἄρ' Ἀνθεμίδην Σιμοείσιον ἐξενάρϊξεν Αἴας διογενῆς· (...) ("Iliad" IV 482–489)

(...) he fell to the ground in the dust like a poplar tree that has grown up in the bottom land of a great marsh, smooth, but from its top grow branches: this a chariot-maker has felled with the gleaming iron so that he may bend a wheel rim for a beautiful chariot, and it lies drying by a river's banks. In this way did Zeus-born Aias slay Simoeisius, son of Anthemion⁸.

In this case, Simoeisius is compared to a poplar tree that is chopped down next to a river⁹. In the preceding verses (474–479), the warrior is said to be born beside the banks of a river. Hence, a further interpretation of this tertium comparationis may reveal Simoeisius' return "home" in his death. This detail illustrates how death similes sometimes look beyond the moment of death: extra information about the deceased adds depth to the story. A reference to the origin of a dying victim recalls the cycle of human life and death. This is part of a recurring reflection in the "Iliad", also linked to the famous *vanitas*-simile in "Iliad" VI 146–149. Here, Glaucus compares human generations to seasons of tree leaves that succeed each other in the natural circle of life. Other vegetative comparantia recall this general reflection and link it to specific cases. In "Iliad" XVIII 57, Thetis melancholily relates how she had to send her son, raised like a tree in an orchard, off to war, never to see him again. Another example ("Iliad" XVII 53–60) shows how a plant is first cultivated, but is finally torn off in a storm. The "falling like a tree" images function as individual echoes of a general reflection and link it to personal suffering in war: the life of this tree ends in battle. In all vegetative similes, the victim and his falling movement are the main focus. If mentioned, the causing factor (for example a woodcutter or a storm wind) only provides the final push to generate this movement. The aggressor does not meet with much resistance from the victim. Since there is no focus on the violent confrontation in the comparans, these similes remove the scenery from the battlefield and create some kind of rustic atmosphere in which the victim dies quietly. The real cause of death, being a fight on the battlefield, is forgotten and the universal reflection about the vanity of human life is evoked. "Death" in itself is the existential focus of these vegetative similes.

By contrast, images of the group of animal comparantia always describe a violent confrontation between two parties, with a fatal outcome for at least one of them. Mostly, lions face prey animals like cattle or deer, cattle faces humans or humans face a lion¹⁰. In general, animal comparantia illustrate how a warrior dies in the heat of battle. The context in which the comparans is placed, depicts death from another point of view than vegetative similes do. The different focus of both groups is apparent in

9 This example also shows a shift in tertium comparationis, from the "falling" of the victim to the "killing" by the hero. This is not uncommon in similes.

10 Only a few similes use other animals, like fish, a worm and locusts.

“Iliad” V 554–560, where the death-struggle of Crethon and Orsilochus is shown in two successive similes.

οἷω τῶ γε λέοντε δῶο ὄρεος κορυφῆσιν
 ἐτραφέτην ὑπὸ μητρὶ βαθείης τάρφεσιν ὕλης·
 τῶ μὲν ἄρ' ἀρπάζοντε βόας καὶ ἴφια μῆλα
 σταθμοὺς ἀνθρώπων κεραΐζετον, ὄφρα καὶ αὐτῶ
 ἀνδρῶν ἐν παλάμησι κατέκταθεν ὄξεϊ χαλκῶ·
 τοίω τῶ χεῖρεσσιν ὑπ' Αἰνείαιο δαμέντε
 καππεσέτην, ἐλάτησιν εἰοικότες ὑψηλῆσι.
 (“Iliad” V 554–560)

Like them two lions on the mountaintops are reared by their dam in the thickets of a deep wood; and the two snatch cattle and noble sheep and make havoc of the farmsteads of men, until they themselves are slain at the hands of men with the sharp sword; just so were these two vanquished at the hands of Aeneas, and fell like tall fir trees.

First, they are compared to lions killing cattle before they are slain themselves. In this simile, they are both the aggressors and the eventual victims. Immediately afterwards, the narrator adds a short comparison in which he depicts their falling bodies as two pines. The different perspective of both images, first “going down in a fight” and then “falling like a tree”, is apparent. The bloody battle of the first death simile is exchanged for a natural detail in the second. Eventually, only death itself remains. Animal death similes have a more direct connection to the narrative, as they use the same comparantia as common battle similes. Consequently, they show death as a logical result of battle. Their tertium comparationis is more bloody than that of vegetative death similes and a fight is clearly evoked. The concrete interaction between both parties varies from “being helpless” to “being killed with much resistance”. The comparans of the cow or bull, present in seven death similes¹¹, provides an interesting example. These animals always perish in death similes, whereas they are mostly vigorous fighters in battle similes. For the cow image, the continuity between battle and death is not as obvious as it could be. As will be pointed out later, Quintus appears to make the role of this comparans more coherent.

A continuity between fight and death draws attention to the behaviour of warriors on the battlefield and hence to their characterization. In general, similes and comparisons contribute to the shaping of characters. Depending on the kind of animal someone is compared to and the situation it finds itself in, additional information about the warrior and his actions is revealed. In death similes, warrior characterization is even more vital: the result of the confrontation is fatal for the victim and glorious for the winning hero; another title to add to his *aristeia*. The aggressor is more obviously present, and thus more clearly characterized, in animal death similes than in the vegetative

11 Iliad V 554–559, XI 172–178, XIII 571–573, XVI 487–491, XVII 61–69, XVII 520–524 and XX 403–406.

group. A famous example is the comparans of the lion killing cattle¹². Whereas most Iliadic death similes are isolated cases applied to constantly changing players, there is one exception. During his *aristeia* in “Iliad” XVI, Patroclus is depicted in several death similes. He is the only major hero in the “Iliad” so thoroughly characterized in death similes¹³. This is quite different in the “Odyssey”, where most of the death similes – all animal images – are centred around three important situations, namely the killing of the suitors¹⁴ and that of Agamemnon¹⁵ and Skylla’s attack¹⁶. This more focused use of death similes has been adopted in the “Posthomerica”.

Hero characterization can still go further. Towards the end of the “Iliad”, the most basic form of a death simile occurs in direct speech of Achilles, in his prayer to Zeus to save him from Scamander’s rage (XXI 282–283: “must I then die like a poor swineherd?”) and of Hector, while he is pondering over his fate (XXII 125: “that I may not die like a woman”)¹⁷. These cases clearly express how both characters feel about their impending death: when facing a perilous situation, they do not fear to die, but they are afraid to die in an insignificant or dishonourable way. This is an important aspect of the heroic code in the “Iliad” which is of importance for the rest of this paper.

Finally, there are some comparisons with comparantia of divers, stones or a wall that do not fit into the other two categories. These images usually depict the movement of (a part of) a dying body, as it is killed but still has a physical impact on its environment on the battlefield (a rolling head, a body falling off a chariot, etc.). For example:

(...) ὁ δ' ἄρ' ἀρνευτήρι ἐοικώς
κάππεος' ἀφ' ὑψηλοῦ πύργου, λίπε δ' ὄστ' εἰα θυμός.
("Iliad" XII 385–386)

He fell like a diver from the high wall, and his spirit left his bones.

This group of death similes displays a combination of elements from both former categories. On the one hand, death is depicted in a bloodless way, with no aggressor present. On the other hand, the image maintains a direct link with the battle in which the fatal blow was given, and sometimes even illuminates a particular cruelty of it.

12 Another remarkable case is XXI 12–16, where Achilles kills masses of panicking soldiers, like fire destroying a swarm of locusts. The abundance of victims, depicted by the uncommon comparans of locusts, makes this simile unique in the “Iliad”. This is another feature Quintus will elaborate.

13 He is a fisherman in XVI 404–410, a woodcutter in XVI 482–486, a lion in XVI 487–491 and in XVI 751–754, before himself being killed as a boar by a lion in XVI 823–828.

14 “Odyssey” IV 335–340, XVII 126–131, and a group of them in XXII: 299–301, 302–308, 384–388, 402–406, 468–472. This is remarkable: death similes cover 89 % of all the verses used for similes and comparisons in book XXII; the highest percentage to be found in both the Homeric epics and the “Posthomerica”.

15 “Odyssey” IV 535, XI 410–411 and XI 412–415.

16 “Odyssey” XII 251–255 and XII 413–414.

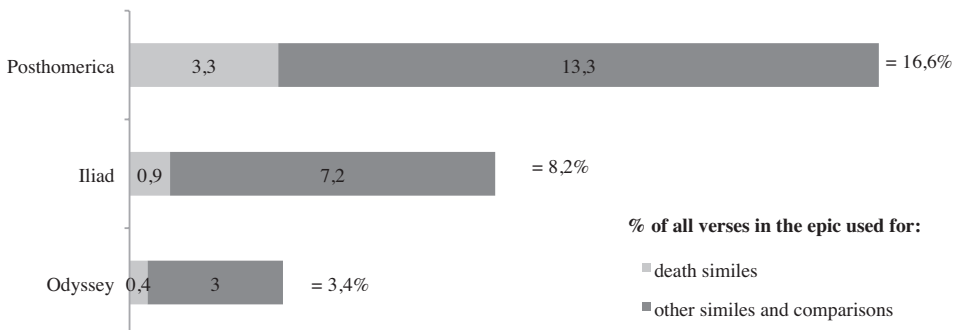
17 Although some of these expressions tend to become fixed in their use, they still have the form of a comparison and can be studied as thus. It seems plausible to include them in this study, as they occur in the speech of the major heroes and clearly express why and how they long to die on the battlefield, as part of their ideology.

Scholars remarked more than once that the depicted movement is not realistic or that the image is rather cruel or horrific. In XI 147 for example, Peisander's head is chopped off and sent spinning like a round stone (KIRK 1993, 241).

To summarize, Iliadic death similes can take varying perspectives. They can focus on death as a proof of the futility of mankind in the universe or as warrior reality instrumental to the heroic code. Moreover, they can either veil the context of death with euphemistic images, or depict the fatal battle as it was, bloody and violent. In some cases, they even highlight cruel details. The victim and sometimes the aggressor are characterized in this death context. These general features are the starting point for the death similes in the "Posthomerica" of Quintus of Smyrna.

2. Posthomeric Adaptation

The Posthomeric corpus of death similes is selected by the same criteria as mentioned above. As the graph shows, their number is significantly higher than in the Homeric epics. The "Posthomerica" consist of fourteen books of the average "Homeric length" (i.e. approximately between 500 and 700 verses each). In total, the "Posthomerica" contain 423 similes and comparisons, 58 of which are death similes¹⁸. This is a striking number compared to the percentages of both the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey". The graph indicates how 16,6 % of the verses in the "Posthomerica" are used for similes and comparisons in general. In the "Iliad", this is 8,1 % and in the "Odyssey" much less (3,4 %). Of all verses for similes and comparisons in the "Posthomerica", nearly one fifth (19,6 % to be precise) is used for death similes, which is significantly more than



18 Death similes in the "Posthomerica" are found in I 249–252, I 262–266, I 352, I 396–402, I 488–493, I 524–528, I 586–587, I 613–621, I 625–629, II 230–234, II 371–378, II 532–534, II 536–537, III 63–66, III 142–148, III 170–176, III 177, III 280–282, III 375–380, III 392–400, III 420–421, IV 423–431, V 409–410, V 485, VI 378–383, VI 410, VII 107–113, VII 115–122, VII 569–576, VIII 89–92, VIII 130–133, VIII 204–208, VIII 230–233, VIII 331–336, VIII 405–408, VIII 414–419, IX 162–168, IX 172–179, IX 198–202, IX 451–459, IX 503–504, X 114–117, X 247–252, XI 73–78, XI 122–127, XI 156–160, XI 170–179, XI 309–315, XI 463–464, XI 483–485, XIII 127–129, XIII 258–266, XIII 242–245, XIII 488–493, XIV 207–208, XIV 258–262, XIV 317–319 and XIV 582–587.

the “Iliad” (10,5% of all simile verses) and the “Odyssey” (12,7%). This remarkable increase of death similes indicates that Quintus acknowledges their importance as a narrative feature, which he has further developed. The “Iliad” is the major source of inspiration for Quintus’ similes and comparisons and equally inspired him for the use of death similes. Both corpuses show the same general characteristics. The Iliadic categories of comparantia used for death similes recur: both vegetative images and animal confrontations similar to those in the “Iliad” are found in the “Posthomerica”. Only a few animals and combinations are new. Equally, there is a rest group of images of objects and persons that do not fit into the other categories. All of these elements show close similarity to the “Iliad”. On the other hand, there are some major adaptations in Quintus’ adopted corpus. These differences determine the original style of the “Posthomerica” and allow the narrator to tell a new story. A significant innovation is the partial shift of comparanda for death similes. In the “Iliad”, minor warriors figure as victims in death similes and only in certain cases the hero appears as well. In Posthomeric death similes, the performance of heroes becomes more frequent and prominent. Primary heroes regularly figure as victims in a death simile and often get more than one simile to depict their death. Other death similes are centred around the aristeia of one hero and primarily depict the impact of his actions. The roles of victim and killer are not mutually exclusive: the two sides of death are sometimes subsequently applied to the same hero¹⁹. This not only indicates a more centralized use of death similes in the “Posthomerica”, it also enables the narrator to propose a coherent characterization of the heroes involved, and of death itself.

3. Hero and Victim in the Death Similes of the Posthomerica

3.1 Dying Heroes

The “Posthomerica” start with the arrival of the amazon Penthesilea to assist the Trojans. As she and later on Memnon challenge Achilles, the latter’s last battles and death form the contents of the first three books of the epic. They provide sufficient material to highlight a few important innovations in the use of death similes.

3.1.1 Before their Death: lethal Energy

Book I counts an abundant number of similes and comparisons, nine of which are death similes. Penthesilea figures in five of them, which immediately indicates how the death imagery of this book is centred around her person²⁰. Initially, they depict

19 The death similes of Patroclus in Iliad XVI may have provided an example that Quintus has elaborated.

20 Penthesilea is killing in 396–402 and 488–493, and dying in 586–587, 613–621 and 625–629. Three more death similes depict her followers, amazons (249–252 and 262–266) and Trojans (352), who are fighting,

her deadly attack on the Greeks. The amazon's first death simile is emblematic for her performance:²¹

ὡς δ' ὀπόθ' ἔρσηεντος ἔσω κήποιο θοροῦσα
 ποίης ἔλδομένη θυμηδέος εἶαρι πόρτις,
 ἀνέρος οὐ παρεόντος, ἐπέσσυται ἄλλοθεν ἄλλη
 σινομένη φυτὰ πάντα νέον μάλα τηλεθόωντα,
 καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄρ κατέδαψε, τὰ δ' ἐν ποσὶν ἠμάλδυνεν·
 ὡς ἄρ' Ἀχαιῶν υἱας ἐπεσσυμένη καθ' ὄμιλον
 κούρη Ἐνυαλίη τοὺς μὲν κτάνε, τοὺς δ' ἐφόβησε.
 (Posthomerica I 396–402)

As a heifer in springtime leaps into a garden
 Eager for the pleasure of its dewy grass,
 When no one is present; it rushes in all directions
 And ruins the plants that before were all so flourishing,
 Devouring some and trampling others under foot;
 So that warrior maiden went rushing through the throng
 Of Achaians, killing some and putting others to flight²¹.

The image of a calf trampling flowers gives a strong impression of Penthesilea's impact on the battlefield. However, the comparans does not fit into the Homeric categories described above. Rather, it is a combination of a vegetative image and an animal confrontation. An intertextual analysis can reveal its meaning. The comparans of a calf is related to a former death simile in book I, in which two other amazons, Alkibia and Derimacheia, are killed like calves by a vigorous youth with an axe (I 262–266). This simile is clearly in a line with the pattern of bestial death similes in the "Iliad": an animal is violently killed. Still, it is a remarkable adaptation of the Homeric model. First, calves are never a victim of death similes in the "Iliad", though cows, oxen and bulls are. Secondly, the brutal act of killing the animal with an axe only occurs in "Iliad" XVII 520–524, where the victim is a cow. Quintus adapts this Iliadic image to a new, rather disproportionate scene in which two calves face the axe. This seems hardly necessary for such weak creatures. Equally, the two amazons in the comparandum seem to be less strong than the average (male) warrior in the "Iliad". When some time later a second image describes how Penthesilea rushes with the lethal energy of a calf, this creates an ambiguous image of the warrior-heroine. On the one hand, the calf is an aggressor²². Penthesilea now even whirls the axe herself²³, which clearly depicts her

killing and dying under her command. One simile shows the acts of her biggest opponents, Achilles and Aiax (524–528), who are on their way to her.

- 21 For the fragments of the "Posthomerica", I cite the recent verse translation of JAMES (2004).
 22 As mentioned above, this is an innovation in itself: in the "Iliad" or the "Odyssey", nor in any other death simile of the "Posthomerica", a cow or a calf is the attacker.
 23 This is an unconventional weapon for warriors on the Trojan plains, but rather common in the depiction of amazons. The queen is explicitly set apart from the other fighters (BÄR 2009, 406, 442–443).

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as an aggressive and dangerous heroine. On the other hand, the reader still recalls the image of I 262–266, where the calves were brutally killed and the amazons appeared to be the weaker kind on the battlefield. This reminiscence now implies a bad omen for their queen: although Penthesilea is killing many at present, death threatens her in the near future (MACIVER 2012, 140). This ambiguous feeling about Penthesilea's performance on the battlefield is a guideline throughout book I. The narrator regularly foreshadows her *hybris* and the fatal outcome it will have²⁴.

The calf trampling flowers is the beginning of a chain of similes leading Penthesilea to her doom. As she continues her *aristeia*, her killing is compared to a storm uprooting blossoming trees (I 488–493). The blossoming of trees is another innovation in death similes compared to Homer and clearly refers to the trampled flowers in I 396–402: many meet their death by the hand of the amazon queen. While Penthesilea is raging over the battlefield, the narrative focus shifts. The next death simile depicts Achilles and Ajax on their way to stop her. They are compared to lions killing masses of sheep (I 524–528), which ranks their animal comparans high above Penthesilea's calf of I 396–402. It causes the reader to anticipate a confrontation between these lions (now already killing sheep with ease) and someone who has formerly been depicted as a raging ... calf. In Iliadic death similes, a lion defeated mature cows (never a calf) more than once. In the "Posthomerica", the characterization of Achilles and Ajax through the lion comparans is clear: the big heroes are headed for a victim that will not stand a chance against them. Indeed, Achilles scorns Penthesilea for being but a deer facing a lion ("Posthomerica" I 586–587), referring to another well-known death comparans of the "Iliad", and predicts she will be killed as thus. He immediately suits the action to the word and pierces her like a man spitting meat or a hunter hitting a deer (I 613–621). Throughout book I, this sequence of similes depicts Penthesilea's way through battle. Each image refers to an element in the previous one: the image of the calf and the crushing of flowers shifts to that of the vigorous lion that eventually kills the deer. Analogically, Penthesilea first kills many, then meets a bigger opponent and is killed herself. Throughout these images, the amazon queen remains the weaker kind of animal that will never be able to best Achilles, the lion. The sequence creates clear expectations about the outcome of Penthesilea's *aristeia* and provides a straightforward characterization of Penthesilea, both as a warrior and a victim, and of Achilles and Ajax. Penthesilea may be a good fighter, but an amazon facing the primary Iliadic heroes does not stand a chance.

24 In Posthomerica I 96, the narrator calls Penthesilea "νηπιή" for believing she could slay Achilles. Immediately after this, Andromache states that the queen could never match Achilles: even Hector could not (100–107). In 124–137, Athena sends Penthesilea a misleading dream about success. Again, the narrator calls her "νηπιή" for believing it. In 172, the heroine leaves for her "first and very last combat" and in 198–204 Zeus sends a bad omen forecasting her death to Priam. This is the start of her *aristeia*.

3.1.2 During their last Moments: A Heroic Death

However, even Achilles must die one day. This happens in book III. Initially, he is raging in battle with furious energy, but this soon angers Apollo, who shoots him. Achilles' death-struggle lasts for more than a hundred verses and is illustrated by seven death similes. Most of these images refer to his *aristeia* in the former books²⁵. The coherence of his last series of images strongly contributes to Achilles' characterization during his last moments. The first death simile sets the pace for the description of his impressive end:

(...) Αἶψα δ' ἀνῆαι
 δῦσαν ὑπὸ κραδίῳ· ὃ δ' ἀνετρέπετ' ἤντε πύργος,
 ὄν τε βίη τυφῶνος ὑποχθονίη στροφάλιγγι
 ῥήξῃ ὑπὲρ δαπέδοιο κραδαιομένης βαθὺ γαίης·
 ὡς ἐκλίθη δέμας ἠὲ κατ' οὔδεος Αἰακίδαο.
 ("Posthomerica" III 62–66)

(...) Immediately pain
 Penetrated his heart and toppled him, like a tower
 That from the force of a subterranean vortex
 Collapses on top of the deeply shaken earth;
 So fell to the ground the handsome frame of Aiakos' grandson.

When first hit by the arrow, Achilles falls like a fortress in an earthquake. This simile refers to "Posthomerica" II 230–234, where the same hero was compared to a house-destroying earthquake²⁶. Images of buildings occasionally appear in death similes, mainly as a symbol of something strong or steadfast. During his *aristeia* in book II, Achilles has the strength to move the hardly movable. In book III, this image is elaborated: although Achilles is able to ruin houses, he himself can also be overtaken. Only, since he is a fortress rather than an ordinary house, the earthquake required for it must be much stronger than the one he himself could cause. Achilles may be, in other words, the biggest hero on the battlefield, there still is a stronger force that can bring him to his knees. This divine power is Apollo. The implicit conclusion of this death simile is that no one but a god can match and even defeat Achilles on the battlefield.

This idea is elaborated in the description of the rest of Achilles' death-struggle. Even when mortally wounded, Achilles remains a terrible threat for anyone within his reach. Two death similes depict this. In the first, he is compared to a wounded lion threatening its surroundings (III 142–148) and the second likens his voice to the

25 In books I and II, Achilles regularly figured as the killer in death similes. In book I, he was depicted as a lion (twice: in I 524–528 and I 586–587), as a storm (I 625–629) and as a hunter (I 613–621). In book II, he killed Trojans like an earthquake sacking houses (II 230–234). In common fighting similes, his comparanda were equally destructive and violent.

26 This is an original comparans (JAMES 2004, 277).

distant roar of a lion, causing fear to fawns (III 170–176). The lion comparans is often used for Achilles in both the “Iliad” and the “Posthomeric²⁷”. Now the lion is dying, but he turns out to be more dangerous than ever before. Wounded lions appear in “Iliad” XX 164–173 and XVI 751–754. A confrontation between fawns and a lion occurs in “Iliad” XI 113–121. Contrary to these three Iliadic images, however, there is no physical confrontation between the lion and its opponent in the two Posthomeric lion similes. In “Posthomeric²⁸” III, the distance between both parties is kept at all times and thus is stressed. This is an indication of the battle context: Achilles is now too dangerous to approach.

When he eventually dies, an image related to the first death simile of book III appears: Achilles falls like a huge mountain (III 177). The impact of this image is clarified when compared to other similes of the same kind. In “Posthomeric²⁸” VIII, Achilles’ son Neoptolemus is three times depicted as an unmovable mountain²⁸, which indicates the incredible firmness of the young hero. Moreover, it explicitly links Neoptolemus to his father, which is a motif throughout the entire “Posthomeric²⁸”. The mountain as an image of strength is not used as such in the “Iliad”, but its appearance in the “Posthomeric²⁸” is unmistakably linked to the biggest of heroes. The death simile in book III takes this image one step further: a falling mountain is a nearly unimaginable fact. In fact, it can only be performed by the strongest of powers: a god’s. In “Posthomeric²⁸” XII 185–188, the gods tear off pieces of mount Ida and throw them to one another during their theomachy. In XIV 580–581, Poseidon throws a mountain to Ajax Minor. Gods are the only ones able to move mountains and they do it to kill some of the biggest heroes, Achilles first of all.

3.1.3 Afterwards: Hierarchy in Death

After Achilles’ death, his body remains the subject of the rest of book III. Three more images immediately refer to his death. One of them is III 280–282, where Glaucus falls next to Achilles’ body, as a shrub next to an oak (δρῦς).

(...) Ὅ δ’ ὑπτίως ἄμφ’ Ἀχιλλῆα
 κάππεσεν, εὖτ’ ἐν ὄρεσσι περὶ στερεὴν δρῦα θάμνος·
 ὡς ὃ γε δουρὶ δαμείεσ περικάππεσε Πηλείωνι
 βλήμενος. (...)
 (“Posthomeric²⁸” III 280–282)

(...) Over Achilles he fell on his back,
 Just like a mountain shrub beside a solid oak.
 Such was the fall of Glaukos upon the son of Peleus
 When struck by the spear. (...)

27 In “Posthomeric²⁸” I, he is described as thus in two death similes (I 524–528 and I 586–587).

28 “Posthomeric²⁸” VIII 167–170, 197–198 and 338–340.

This is the only vegetative death simile for Achilles and it covers multiple layers of meaning. First of all, it recalls the words of Thetis in “Iliad” XVIII 57, where she predicted that her son would once fall like a tree on the battlefield. The long expected prophecy is now finally realized. Secondly, this original adaptation of the Iliadic tree comparans adds new significance to the famous image. For once, not only the actual dying victim, in this case Glaucus, is depicted, but also the body next to which he falls, namely that of Achilles. This picture clearly enhances a hierarchy. Achilles is lying on the ground like an oak, whereas Glaucus is only a bush, compared to him. The visual effect of this scene characterizes both victims and shows the difference between them. The oak is, evidently, a conventional image for vigour throughout the “Iliad” and “Posthomerica”²⁹. However, this is the only occurrence for that particular tree in a Posthomerian death simile. Achilles’ greatness persists, even in death.

Altogether, book III results in a clear characterization of the dying and dead Achilles, ensuing from his life in war and battle and setting him apart from his rivals. The comparans of the lion forms a thread of continuity in his life and persists to the end: he dies as the raging warrior he was. Even in his last fight, he is feared as never before. His death outmatches anything human or otherwise heroic on the battlefield. Only a god could slay the best of Greek heroes. This hierarchy goes further down, as Achilles could easily kill Penthesilea, who herself was a threat to the minor soldiers she killed in masses. This detailed case indicates that death similes in the “Posthomerica” elaborate the characterization of heroes, their performances on the battlefield and even their position to one another. How they fight is how they die, for who is not strong enough, will be killed by the greater. A hero’s death is inevitably linked to his deeds while alive and for this he will be remembered for ever after.

3.2 The Heroic Code

After Achilles’ burial in book IV and Ajax’ death in book V, the war carries on until book XII, where the army decides that the siege cannot be won by force. In the battle scenes throughout these books, heroic deeds of several persons generate death similes that establish a clear view on the consequences of death for both heroes and victims. Their guiding line appears to be a heroic code of old times.

3.2.1 Being Remembered

Book IV is dedicated to the memorial of Achilles. A most remarkable death simile figures in the middle of his funeral games.

29 The oak comparison is used in three death similes in the “Iliad”, for Asius (XIII 389–393), Sarpedon (XVI 482–486) and for Hector’s “almost death” simile (XIV 414–418). In “Iliad” XII 132–136 (not a death simile), the oak is used to depict two firm warriors who will not give way.

Ὡς δ' ὀπόθ' ἐρσήεντα καὶ εὐθαλέοντ' ἀνὰ κῆπον
 ὑδρηλῆς καπέτοιο μάλ' ἀγχόθι τηλεθάοντα
 ἢ στάχυν ἢ μήκωνα, πάρος καρποῖο τυχῆσαι,
 κέρση τις δρεπάνῳ νεοθηγεί, μηδ' ἄρ' ἔαση
 ἐς τέλος ἢ μολεῖν μηδ' ἐς σπόρον ἄλλον ἰκέσθαι,
 ἀμήσας κενεόν τε καὶ ἄσπορον ἐσσομένοισι
 μέλλονθ' ἐρσήεντος ὑπ' εἶαρος ἀλδαίνεσθαι.
 ὧς υἱὸν Πριάμοιο θεοῖς ἐναλίγκιον εἶδος
 Πηλείδης κατέπεφεν, ἔτ' ἄχνοον, εἰσέτι νύμφης
 νήιδα, νηπιάχοισιν ὁμῶς ἔτι κουρίζοντα.
 ("Posthomerica" IV 423–431)

As in a garden dewy-fresh and flourishing,
 Growing strongly close to the side of a water channel,
 A poppy or a blade of grain before it ripens
 Is cut by a newly sharpened scythe and isn't allowed
 To come to true fulfillment in another seeding,
 Mown down by the gleaming bronze still empty and seedless,
 When it was ready to grow with the dews of spring.
 Such was the son of Priam in his godlike beauty
 When killed by the son of Peleus, beardless still and still
 Without a bride, no more than a child in his youthfulness.

In this passage, the weapons of Troilus are exposed as the price of the next contest. Remarkably, the narrator adds a death simile to describe how Achilles obtained them: he killed their former owner like a poppy or a cornstalk. It is unusual for a death simile to occur in a flashback to the moment of death. This case, however, is imbedded in a larger situation. Earlier in book IV, Nestor gave a funeral oration for Achilles, in which he recalled the latter's heroic deeds, amongst others the killing of Troilus³⁰ (IV 153–155). This death simile, referring to the same victim, can be understood as another flashback. The glorious memory of Achilles is the main topic of book IV. In his heroic past, Achilles gained the glory and renown that now establish his eternal fame. Troilus is only one example of the abundant feats of arms Achilles has performed, but the comparantia used in this simile link it to the rest.

The poppy image is known from the "Iliad", where it occurs in two death similes, for Gorgythion³¹ (VIII 306–308) and for Ilioneus (XIV 499–500). In both cases, the downward movement of the victim's head is compared to that of a poppy bending forward. In the Posthomerian adaptation, however, the entire plant is mown down. This

30 When Troilus was killed during the Trojan war is not specified in Homer (in "Iliad" XXIV 257, there is only a short reference to the fact that he is already dead) or in the "Posthomerica". The Trojan prince is mentioned in several other sources, for example in the Kypria, in a lost tragedy of Sophocles bearing his name, and in Aeneid IV 474–478 (JAMES 2004, 292).

31 Gorgythion, like Troilus, is a son of Priam.

drastic shift can be explained by the presence of the ear of corn in the same simile. The combination of a poppy and a cornstalk in one simile is an innovation of Quintus. Moreover, he has adapted the existing Homeric comparans of corn (or a cornfield) and given it a new meaning. Images of cornfields are common in the “Iliad”. The first one is found in book II 144–149, where the roused army is compared to a stirred multitude of corn (στάχυς); the amount is the most important tertium comparationis. Variations on this image, without the word στάχυς, occur in death similes³². In the “Posthomerica”, the word στάχυς (also used in “Posthomerica” IV 423–431) is adopted and specifically applied to death similes. In III 375–380, corpses lie spread over the battlefield as mown sheaves of corn in a field. Later on, the word στάχυς becomes a recurring comparans for the victims of death and devastation³³. In some cases, the tertium comparationis implies a focus on big numbers. This is derived from the Homeric simile in “Iliad” II 144–49. Hence, the στάχυς simile in “Posthomerica” IV 423–431 is linked to death on the battlefield, even on large scale. In combination with the poppy comparans, the connotations of multitude and individuality merge: many individuals have been killed. As this simile is particularly related to Achilles, its comparandum, Troilus, becomes part of a large summing up of the achievements of one man. During his life, Achilles has killed many. Troilus was only one of the corn stalks the hero has mown down. As the Greeks remember Achilles killing Troilus, they also remember his other victims besides the Trojan prince. In book IV it is thus indicated that Achilles’ fame will surely be remembered.

3.2.2 Mass Slaughter

Quintus’ adaptation of the word στάχυς and the remembrance of Achilles lead to another major innovation in the “Posthomerica” use of death similes, namely the increased attention for the topic of mass slaughter. As mentioned, some isolated images depicting this topic can be found in the corpus of death similes in the “Iliad”³⁴. In the “Posthomerica”, these “seeds” are developed into a new, prominent kind of death simile that focusses on mass death. In Quintus’ epic, eighteen out of the 58 death similes depict mass slaughter and focus on multitude³⁵. The comparantia of these similes are mainly vegetative images, often inspired by Homeric models. The examples of the

32 For example: in “Iliad” XI 558–565, a field (ἀρουρα) is trampled by a donkey that can hardly be chased away (the comparandum is Ajax who is driven back, but continues his fighting and killing). In “Iliad” XX 495–499, Achilles crushes bodies like cows thresh barley (κρῖ).

33 στάχυς appears as comparans in IX 473–47 (Philoctetes revives after his cure, like a cornfield that flourishes after a destructive storm), XIII 242–245 (Priam is beheaded like a stalk of corn that is cut off) and XIV 75–81 (the destroyed plain of Troy is compared to the ravage on a cornfield after a terrible storm).

34 Iliad XXI 12–16 (where Achilles slays men like locusts) and XI 558–565 (where animals trample fields) are mentioned above.

35 Posthomerica I 352, I 396–402, I 524–528, II 532–534, II 536–537, III 375–380, V 409–410, VII 569–576, VIII 130–133, VIII 230–233, VIII 331–336, IX 162–168, IX 172–179, IX 198–202, IX 503–504, X 247–525, XI 122–127 and XI 309–315.

cornfield and spread out or trampled harvest are discussed above. Other images include plains full of chopped trees or branches, clearly derived from the fallen tree comparans, and masses of flowers or leaves in the wind, reminders of the Iliadic vanitas reflection. A few mass death similes depict killed animals, but the prominence of vegetative comparantia suggests a strong focus on the mere fact of death: war costs lives.

Mass death similes occur in varying situations in the narrative. Some simply give a panoramic overview of the battlefield and the total number of victims after a battle. Other mass death similes are linked to a specific hero during his or her aristeia. Nine similes are used to depict the glorious success of Penthesilea, Eurypylyus, Neoptolemus and Deiphobus on the battlefield³⁶. These warriors are characterized while gaining heroic glory and renown, which is the normal way of the hero in battle, as the examples of Penthesilea and Achilles have already proven. As the “Posthomerica” proceed, however, there is a growing tendency towards more focus on the particular fact of killing multitudes. It is a prominent element in the description of the aristeiai of three male heroes, concentrated in books VII–IX. As Neoptolemus and Eurypylyus are fighting their way to the biggest duel of the “Posthomerica”, their mass slaughter is abundantly stressed. Somewhat later, Deiphobus’ minor aristeia is described in the same way. These books have the biggest concentration of mass death similes in the epic. Moreover, book IX has the highest percentage of death similes in the “Posthomerica”, closely followed by book XI. At the end of the Trojan siege, the victims of war and their high numbers become more visible, as if a climax of bloodshed is attained.

3.2.3 Joyful Killing

In a few mass slaughter similes, the tertium comparationis is even more specific, “to be glad about these numbers”. In these cases, the comparandum is a hero enjoying his massive killing. In IX 163–168, Deiphobus rejoices at the result of his work, like a woodcutter looking at a mass of chopped branches. In VIII 311–336, Neoptolemus enjoys the killing like a boy that loves to kill flies. This second simile shows a skilful adaptation of several Homeric similes, to result in a new portrayal of death. Several similes and comparisons in the “Iliad” use the fly comparans³⁷, not surprisingly depicting the insects as noisy, annoying animals (often) occurring in great numbers and easily swooped away. Quintus reuses this image more than once³⁸, but in VIII 331–336 the fly comparans is combined with the aspect of joy, taken from another famous Homeric simile. In “Iliad” XV 361–366, Apollo, destroying the Greek wall, is compared

36 Posthomerica I 396–402, I 524–528, VII 569–576, VIII 130–133, VIII 230–233, VIII 331–336, IX 162–168, IX 172–179, IX 198–202.

37 In Iliad II 469–473 (a mass of warriors), IV 130–131 (Hera swoops away an arrow to protect Menelaus), XVI 641–644 (fighters in the battle around the body of Sarpedon) and XVII 570–572 (Menelaus protecting Patroclus’ body).

38 See also Posthomerica III 263–265.

to a boy enjoying the destruction of a sand castle. As a result, the Posthomeric adaptation shows how Neoptolemus enjoys his killing activity (MACIVER 2012, 180–181).

It is a remarkable choice of Quintus to combine the aspect of killing with the aspect of joy in a death simile, but it fits well into the context of the war code these heroes follow. The more they kill, the greater will be their renown and the better will they be remembered after death. At the end of the Trojan war, their mass slaughter achievements are more closely focussed on. This is a way of stressing their vigour in battle and hence their appreciation with regard to an old heroic creed. The heroic code in the “Iliad” is one of gaining honour on the battlefield, by being the strongest, killing as many as possible and gathering spoil. As indicated above, the most important heroes of the “Iliad”, both Hector and Achilles, express their fear to die in a dishonourable way. Dying in itself does not seem fearful. On the contrary, the Iliadic Achilles eventually chooses to die young and gloriously, rather than to live a long and insignificant life. This famous motif is inherited by his son Neoptolemus in “Posthomerica” XII as he repeats his father’s creed and is determined to follow it himself.

βουλοίμην δ’ ὑπ’ Ἄρηι ἐνκλειῶς ἀπολέσθαι
ἢ ἐφυγῶν Τροίηθεν ὄνειδεα πολλὰ φέρεσθαι.
 (“Posthomerica” XII 301–302)

I would rather be the war god’s glorious victim
Than escape from Troy with a burden of disgrace.

Hence, towards the end of the “Posthomerica”, the results of the killings by heroes become more apparent and are explicitly described in more frequent death similes. Although related to the heroic code described above, it also draws attention to the many victims. They become the main focus of the narrative in the final books of the “Posthomerica”, about the sack of Troy.

3.3 Victims

In books XIII and XIV, the heroes leave the battlefield to sack Troy. This leads to another kind of death similes, now mainly focussing on the new victims of the changed war situation. As the war evolves from siege to sack, not only warriors, but all inhabitants of Troy are exposed to mortal danger. This is an important shift, compared to the former books and to the “Iliad”. So far, death similes were used to describe warrior deaths only, but now the changed war situation offers new possibilities. Moreover, towards the last books of the “Posthomerica”, an entire framework of similes has been constructed, that can now be adapted and referred to. In other words, the death similes in these last books encourage not only a reflection on the “Iliad”, but also on the “Posthomerica” itself.

3.3.1 From Siege to Sack

The first death simile in book XIII proves to be emblematic for the descriptions of this new style of warfare.

Οἱ δ' ὡς τ' ἀφνειοῖο σύες κατὰ δώματ' ἄνακτος
 εἰλαπίνην λαοῖσιν ἀπείριτον ἐντύνοντος
 μυρίοι ἐκτείνοντο, λυγρῶ δ' ἀνέμισγετο λύθρῳ
 οἶνος ἔτ' ἐν κρητῆρσι λελειμμένος. (...)
 ("Posthomerica" XIII 127–130)

Just like pigs in the palace of a wealthy prince
 When he prepares an abundant banquet for his people,
 They were killed in thousands and with their grisly gore was mingled
 The wine that was still left in the mixing bowls. (...)

In a depiction of bloody slaughter, drunk Trojans are slain like pigs for a royal banquet. Blood and wine are mixed on the floor. This cruel comparans never occurs in the "Iliad", but is remarkably similar to one in "Odyssey" XI.³⁹

(...) περὶ δ' ἄλλοι ἑταῖροι
 νῶλεμέως κτείνοντο σύες ὡς ἀργιόδοντες,
 οἱ ῥά τ' ἐν ἀφνειοῦ ἀνδρὸς μέγα δυναμένοιο
 ἢ γάμῳ ἢ ἐράνῳ ἢ εἰλαπίνῃ τεθαλίῃ.
 ἦδη μὲν πολέων φόνῳ ἀνδρῶν ἀντεβόλησας,
 μουνᾶξ κτεινομένων καὶ ἐνὶ κρατερῇ ὑσμίνῃ·
 ἀλλὰ κε κείνα μάλιστα ἰδὼν ὀλοφύραο θυμῶ,
 ὡς ἀμφὶ κρητῆρα τραπέζας τε πληθούσας
 κείμεθ' ἐνὶ μεγάρῳ, δάπεδον δ' ἅπαν αἵματι θῦεν.
 ("Odyssey" XI 412–420)

(...) around about me the rest of my comrades were slain relentlessly like white-tusked boars, which are slaughtered in the house of a rich and powerful man at a marriage feast, or a joint meal, or a gay drinking about. Before now you have been present at the slaying of many men, killed in single combat or in the press of the fight, but in heart you would have felt most pity had you seen that sight, how about the mixing bowl and the laden tables we lay in the hall, and the floor all swam with blood³⁹.

In this passage, the spirit of Agamemnon relates his own tragic death and that of his companions: he is slain like a cow at the crib (XI 411). The peaceful setting of this common death comparans is meaningful in the narrative context: Agamemnon is killed at home and not during a heroic battle. His companions are likewise murdered, like swine for a feast. The spirit of Agamemnon comments that, although Odysseus had seen many deaths on the battlefield, this way of dying would have made him

39 The "Odyssey" translation is by the hand of MURRAY, revised by DIMOCK (1995).

wail: “like we lay there among the craters and filled tables in the palace, and the floor seethed with blood”. This is a most dishonourable death for a hero like Agamemnon. The visual effect of the Odyssean image is perfectly recalled in the simile of “Posthomerica” XIII 127–129, where the Greeks cause many Trojan warriors to die in the same dishonourable way, taken by surprise and slaughtered at home, rather than in an honest battle. The leader of this slaughter is not aware of his own similar fate in the near future, but the reader understands the dramatic irony. Moreover, the cruel bloodshed in the image seems to condemn the actions of the Greeks: this is no longer honourable warfare, but a vicious trick. The victim is surprised in a moment of weakness. In this, Agamemnon and the Trojans eventually die alike.

The Posthomerian simile contains even more ironical associations, as the picture reflects two other moments of Trojan weakness in the “Posthomerica”. In book I 89–90, Penthesilea is warmly welcomed and the Trojans prepare a banquet, such as a king would give after a great victory. However, only six verses later the narrator calls the amazon queen *νηπίη* (I 96) because of her belief she could slay Achilles. Penthesilea’s fate is revealed to the reader even while the Trojans are still feasting their hope, which makes this simile tragically ironic. This happens again in the first verses of book XIII, when the Trojans are celebrating their presumed victory. They get drunk (verses 5–8), which will eventually lead to their doom as they cannot properly respond to the Greek attack. Eventually, the simile in XIII 127–129 turns out to be a natural consequence of this excessive party: their wine is spoiled and now mixed with their blood (*SPINOULA* 2000, 169). For the second time, the reader is aware of the dramatic irony of the simile: the Trojans have celebrated too early once more and now pay the price for it. Their doom is to die dishonourably. Hence, at the beginning of the sack of Troy, a new way of dying announces itself, in which battle is not relevant anymore. This ominous simile is only the beginning of a huge slaughter.

3.3.2 Innocent Victims

As the plundering in book XIII continues, more Trojans meet their doom within the city walls. Gradually, a new kind of victim appears.

Ἦύτε πόρτιν ὄρεσφι λύκοι χατέοντες ἐδωδῆς
 κρημνὸν ἐς ἠχίηντα κακοφραδίησι βάλωνται
 μητρὸς ἀποτμήξαντες ἐνγλαγέων ἀπὸ μαζῶν,
 ἢ δὲ θέη γοώουσα φίλον τέκος ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα
 μακρὰ κινυρομένη, τῆ δ’ ἐξόπιθεν κακὸν ἄλλο
 ἔλθη, ἐπεὶ κε λέοντες ἀναρπάζουσι καὶ αὐτήν·
 ὧς τὴν ἀσχαλόωσαν ἄδην περὶ παιδὸς ἐοῖο
 ἦγον δῆιοι ἄνδρες ἄμ’ ἄλλαις ληιάδεσσι
 κούρην Ἡετίωνος ἀμύμονος αἰνὰ γοῶσαν.
 (“Posthomerica” XIII 258–266)

Just as mountain wolves in need of food with cruel
 Cunning will drive a calf over an echoing cliff
 After cutting it off from its mother's milky udder;
 The mother bemoaning her precious offspring runs to and fro
 With loud and plaintive cries, till she herself is caught
 By another evil, lions that come from behind her;
 So in the intensity of the grief that she felt for her son
 The daughter of noble Eetion, bitterly wailing,
 Was led with other captive women by her foes.

Hector's son is thrown off the walls like a calf chased off cliffs by wolves, while his lamenting mother is captured by lions. The image of a lamenting cow refers to "Posthomerica" VII 257–261, where Neoptolemus' mother wails the departure of her son, like a cow that has already lost her calf. In book VII, the anti-war voice of the lamenting mother is also illustrated with similes, which makes it equal to that of the son longing for war. This is remarkable, for such a thing never happens in the "Iliad". In "Posthomerica" VII, Quintus deliberately chooses to display both points of view in similar wordings. This adds a new dimension to the Iliadic war code of honour and glory: it is also something frightful and terrible. This ominous thought is echoed in book XIII, where the mother's fear becomes reality: not only does Andromache lose her son, she is also captured herself and thus becomes a victim of war herself. At this point, lions appear for the first time in book XIII. Since the beginning of the sack of Troy, the Greek attackers have been consistently depicted as raging, cruel wolves⁴⁰. The shift of comparans that takes place in this simile is remarkable: the attacking wolves are suddenly replaced by lions. They capture a victim that does not offer any resistance, for her child is just brutally taken from her. This is an unusual situation for the heroic lion to figure in. The conventional hero comparans now comes into action when women and children are threatened with slaughter. This is again a new situation caused by the changed war context.

The same simile implies one more significant reference. The confrontation between lion and cow also occurs in the first simile in the "Posthomerica". In I 5–8, the Trojans cower inside the city walls in fear of Achilles, like cows afraid of a lion. In book XIII, this long anticipated confrontation actually takes place and all Trojan fears have come true: Troy is sacked, the family of Hector is taken⁴¹ and mothers lose their children. From the beginning of the "Posthomerica", the tension towards this moment has grown and the Trojans have dreaded their inescapable doom.

The two examples of book XIII show how honourable battle has changed into a cruel slaughter of helpless drunks and women with children. Dramatic irony reflecting

40 Wolves also appear in Posthomerica XIII 44–49 and 133–142, with clear references to these images in 67–76 and 156–161. All of these cases display sheep facing a wolf or another predator, that becomes more hungry and cruel throughout the book.

41 In Posthomerica I 17, Hector's death is compared to the sack of Troy.

the Trojans' false hope and references to their justified fears emphasize the tragic state of the victims. Moreover, the triumphing Greeks are now depicted as slaughterers and wolves, and eventually as lions attacking a powerless victim. At the climax of the Trojan war, no heroic similes appear to illustrate the grand victory of the Greeks. The narrative perspective has changed.

3.3.3 Metamorphosis of the Hero?

The next morning resounds with the complaints of the survivors and the joy of the Greeks. The general tone of the similes and comparisons in book XIV is rather depressing. Particularly highlighted is the description of the last kill of the Greeks. It is the last exploit of two main heroes, namely Achilles and Neoptolemus, and redefines the meaning of "heroism" at the end of this epic.

The day after the sack of Troy, a dream image of Achilles appears to Neoptolemus and orders the sacrifice of the Trojan princess Polyxena. He claims her as a reward for his actions when alive and as a repayment for Briseis. The hero seeks honour even after his death and therefore Polyxena must die. This blood-curdling passage is illustrated with a sequence of comparisons and similes, some of which can be defined as death similes. In XIV 258–262, Polyxena is taken from her mother and dragged away like a calf to the altar. This recalls the death simile of "Iliad" XX 403–406, where a belching bull is dragged to the altar. For the second time in this epic, a weak calf replaces the stronger adult animal. This adds a sense of cruelty to the picture, similar to the image of the killed amazons in "Posthomerica" I 262–266. However, in book XIV the victim is no longer a warrior or an amazon. Polyxena is nothing more than a powerless victim. She has not chosen to fight, let alone to be killed in war. The tears she sheds on the way to the altar are reminders of the lamenting cow images earlier in the epic⁴². Only now, the focus of the simile has shifted to the young victim itself. In a pathetic scene, mother and child lament their helplessness in this cruel war. Again, anticipated fears have come true.

The next three similes are no death similes, but strongly contribute to the pathetic depiction of the scene at hand. Polyxena is a frail, scared and panicking girl. In XIV 263–269, her tears flow like olive oil on a press. This image echoes the mass death simile of IX 198–202, where Neoptolemus killed as if he gladly collected a rich olive harvest. It is also Neoptolemus who will execute the sacrifice of Polyxena without a second thought. His former mass slaughter simile is now adapted to a special, tragic case. Similarly, in book XIII, Neoptolemus has chopped off king Priam's head, like an ear of corn (στάχυς; "Posthomerica" XIII 242–245). The στάχυς comparans is also known from a mass death simile. Priam is killed as one of the many victims of Neop-

42 In two similes, mother cows wail their lost calf (Posthomerica XIII 258–266 and VII 257–261).

tolemus, but the situation in book XIII is incomparable to the battlefield⁴³. Priam is not a warrior, nor does he offer any resistance. On the contrary, in the verses preceding the actual murder, Priam begs Neoptolemus to kill him and to release him from his misery. This is a new context for the familiar corn image. The victim is broken by misery and the enemy hero is still eager to kill him. Polyxena's case is comparable to this, but takes it one step further. Contrary to Priam, she is terrified and does not want to die. Still, the helpless young girl will be mercilessly crushed by the hero, like one of the olives he used to harvest on the battlefield. She will be his last and most helpless war victim. Neoptolemus has come a long way since the battlefield. In Troy, he gladly killed a desperate old man asking him to. Now he drags a terrified girl to the altar, her tears reflecting all the victims he formally made and begging him to show mercy, to no avail.

When Neoptolemus finally cuts Polyxena's throat, another death simile appears. In XIV 317–319, blood flows from her neck, as the blood of a wounded bear or she-boar that drips in the snow. The white colour recalls a comparison in "PostHomerica" XIV 271: at the moment Neoptolemus dragged her off, Polyxena's skin was likened to ivory. The narrator thus gives the audience an ominous glimpse of her pure innocence, which is now brutally murdered. The bloody boar also once more evokes the slaughtered swine in XIII 127–129. Polyxena is the last Trojan victim in the "Posthomerica".

4. Conclusion

Similes and comparisons describing death are widespread in the "Posthomerica". They characterize victors and victims and the context of death. For heroes, killing is the key to eternal fame and glory, in the Iliadic way of the word. The "Posthomerica" start from this point of view. Yet, there is a clear evolution in the portrayal of heroic deeds throughout the epic. Starting from Achilles' predominance, it gradually evolves to mass slaughter justified for heroic grandeur and then eventually cumulates in the sack of Troy. Even after this terrible bloodshed, the two dominant heroes are not satisfied. Achilles claims the life of an innocent maiden to lavish his thirst for blood and honour. Neoptolemus executes the order and uses his heroic skills in a most pathetic situation. The death similes describing this are different from those about the battles during the siege. Now the wailing victim is described in all her innocence and fear. The hero is the executer, or rather executioner, of a deed that gets no understanding in the description of the narrator. This leaves the audience with a mixed feeling about the heroic deeds they may have applauded in the course of the story. The altered voice of the narrator puts heroism into a new perspective and may question a long-admired ideal.

43 This analogy can be taken even further: Neoptolemus is of course the son of Achilles, who killed prince Troilus. Both in book XIII and in IV 423–431, the ear of corn is used as the comparans for the respective death similes of Priam and Troilus. Father kills son and son kills father, another feat of arms to add to the list of the aristeia of the Aeacids.

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