

2023

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Recommended Citation

Emery, Alison (2023) "θυμός in Homer's Iliad, Book XXII: What it Means for the Greek Warrior," *Parnassus: Classical Journal*: Vol. 10, Article 12.

Available at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/parnassus-j/vol10/iss1/12>

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θυμὸς in Homer's *Iliad*, Book XXII: What it Means for the Greek Warrior.

Alison Emery '23

In Book 22 of the *Iliad*, Homer uses the similes of a hawk and a dove, and wolves and lambs, and likens them to Hector and Achilles, respectively. In this paper, I will analyze the difference between these two similes. Although they are both emphasizing a predator/prey relationship between Achilles and Hector, there is evidence that Homer may be making even deeper insights with the wolves/lambs simile. Specifically, Homer uses this simile to provide commentary on the character of warriors. I will pay particular attention to Homer's use of θυμὸς in these similes, as I believe they are semantically different, and are evidence of the θυμὸς that is integral to Homer's conception of a warrior.

The hawk/dove simile is found in Steadman as follows:

ἦ ὦτε κίρκος ὄρεσφιν, ἐλαφρότατος πετεηνῶν, 139

ῥηϊδίως οἴμησε μετὰ τρήρωνα πέλειαν, 140

ἦ δέ θ' ὕπαιθα φοβεῖται, ὃ δ' ἐγγύθεν ὀξὺ λεληκῶς 141

ταρφέ' ἐπαῖσσει, ἐλέειν τέ ἐ θυμὸς ἀνώγει 142

ὥς ἄρ' ὃ γ' ἐμμεμαῶς ἰθὺς πέτετο, τρέσε δ' Ἑκτώρ 143

τεῖχος ὕπο Τρώων, λαιψηρὰ δὲ γούνατ' ἐνώμα. 144

The Fagles translation of the simile is as follows:

*As the wild mountain hawk, the quickest thing on wings,
launching smoothly, swooping down on a cringing dove and the dove
flits out from under, the hawk screaming over the quarry,
plunging over and over, his fury driving him down to beak and tear his kill—
so Achilles flew at him, breakneck on in fury with Hector fleeing along
the walls of Troy, fast as his legs would go.*

In this simile, Achilles is likened to a hawk that is chasing a dove, Hector. The diction is important here, with words and phrases such as “launching”, “screaming”, “plunging”, and “to beak and

tear” giving the clear picture that this scene involves a hunt. It is physical, violent even. Homer’s use of θυμός in line 142 gives the sense that Achilles’ is being driven by animal appetite. Evidence of this can be found in line 142 of the greek: ἐλέειν τέ ἐ θυμός ἀνώγει. In this clause, Homer describes that the hawk’s θυμός is ἀνώγει, or driving him to grab the dove. Thus, θυμός as it is used here provides the impetus for the hawk, or Achilles, to attack Hector. This description of θυμός as animal drive is different than Homer’s sense of θυμός in the wolves/lambs simile, which reads in the greek as follows:

ὥς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὄρκια πιστά, 262

οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν, 263

ἀλλὰ κακὰ φρονέουσι διαμπερὲς ἀλλήλοισιν, 264

ὥς οὐκ ἔστ’ ἐμὲ καὶ σὲ φιλήμεναι, οὐδέ τι νῶϊν 265

ὄρκια ἔσσονται, πρὶν γ’ ἢ ἕτερόν γε πεσόντα 266

αἵματος ἄσαι Ἄρηα, ταλαύρινον πολεμιστήν. 267

The Fagles translation of this simile is:

There are no binding oaths between men and lions,

wolves and lambs can enjoy no meeting of the minds -

They are all bent on hating each other to the death. So with you and me.

No love between us. No truce till one or the other falls and gluts

with blood Ares who hacks at men behind his rawhide shield.

Here, θυμός takes on a different meaning. This simile comes at a crucial point in Book 22. Hector is exhausted and has given up. He tries to get Achilles to enter into an agreement with him, but Achilles refuses. This simile is Achilles’ response. Compared to the hawk/dove simile, this one is very similar, because it involves a predator/prey relationship. One may wonder what, if any, difference there is between a hawk and a dove versus a wolf and a lamb. The main difference is that lambs are typically domesticated. It is interesting that Hector is now likened to an animal that is not wild, like a dove, but rather confined to a space and thus there for Achilles’ taking. This might be speaking to the characterization of Hector as a mortal man. While Achilles is half-god, and thus free to roam where he wishes as a wolf roams in the

wild, Hector is more vulnerable because he is a mere human. In this way, these predator/prey similes reflect aspects of Achilles and Hector as men, and also reflect their position at this point in Book 22, with Hector near defeat, asking for a burial oath, and Achilles with the complete upper hand.

These similes go further than demonstrating a predator/prey relationship between Hector and Achilles. Consider the context. The hawk/dove simile occurs as a description of a hunt; Achilles is chasing Hector. It is generally expected that a simile in which two animals—a predator and a prey—are likened to two people is meant to highlight an unequal power dynamic. Specifically, a relation in which one person is better situated in terms of social, political, or economic status, or is able to physically dominate another person. This is a common interpretation of predator/prey similes. However, that is not what the wolves/lambs simile seems to be communicating, even though it is a predator/prey simile. As one piece of evidence, consider that θυμὸν in line 263 is modified by ὁμόφρονα. Here, Homer is not talking about θυμὸς as an animal drive. Instead, he is talking about uniting minds. Achilles states, *wolves and lambs can enjoy no meeting of the minds*. LSJ lists nine different definitions of θυμὸς, one of which is “mind, temper, or will”. Significantly, as an example of this translation of θυμὸς LSJ also lists the wolves/lambs simile in the greek. Furthermore, in the lines before and after the wolves/lambs simile, Achilles is using words like ὄρκα in line 266 and συνημιοσύνας in line 261. The diction from the hawk/dove simile of launching, plunging, and screaming is starkly contrasted with Achilles’ utterances about oaths and a truce in this simile. This is further evidence that θυμὸς in these two similes are semantically different, and that θυμὸς in the wolves/lamb simile is not concerned with animal drive but instead conveys something closer to a rational will.

Considering more of the context of this simile is also crucial here. Hector asks Achilles to agree to an oath that would guarantee the burial of whomever is killed. Achilles explains that this conflict will not be settled with an oath or an agreement of some kind, and that it must be a fight to the death. It is interesting here that in this simile, although θυμὸς that is not akin to animal drive, but is closer to a definition of “mind” or “will”, Homer still seems to be reverting back to the animal drive, the violence, and the physicality that was present in the hawk/dove simile. In this way, one may view Hector’s

response, considered with the wolves/lambs simile, as situating battle as antithetical to θυμός. However, I argue that battle is not antithetical to θυμός; rather, it is integral to it. The wolves/lambs simile is not only a way for Achilles to show that he and Hector differ in that he is half-god, whereas Hector is merely a mortal man, and therefore, is on the brink of defeat. More than that, Achilles is explaining that there is something fundamentally different about the way he and Hector are approaching this conflict. In other words, Hector and Achilles differ on the basis of their θυμός. Achilles is explaining that the rules between wolves and lambs makes it clear that the agreement Hector proposes is impossible. This is the point on which Achilles is trying to reason with Hector: that the θυμός of a warrior requires that conflict be solved in battle. It is also significant that Achilles, though some may view him as regressing to violence again, explains this to Hector very rationally. His will, or θυμός, is clearly at work here, and he cannot do the work of a warrior by entering battle without first making it known to Hector that this is what the θυμός of a warrior requires—of both of them.

Further evidence of this is in the lines following the wolves/lambs simile. For example, line 268 is παντοίης ἀρετῆς μμνήσκεο, which means, *remember excellence of every kind*. The imperative mood of μμνήσκεο draws the reader's attention and demonstrates a sense of urgency and seriousness on the part of Achilles. This is important because Achilles is asking Hector to remember the ἀρετῆς, and surely he means the excellence of warriors. In this way, Achilles is not only appealing to Hector as a warrior, but is also making a point about the essence of a warrior. This paper has shown that Hector has lost sight of how he should act in this situation because his conception of θυμός is different from Achilles'. By using the diction μμνήσκεο and the imperative mood, Achilles is trying to get Hector to reconcile his current sense of θυμός with the situation, and realize that it needs to change. Also, it is interesting that Achilles uses a verb meaning to remember, because this shows that for Hector, it is not an issue of learning, but of remembering what is already known: that a warrior must solve issues such as these in battle, and that reaching this conclusion is the work of the rational will, or θυμός.

Overall, I believe that Homer is trying to convey something with these similes that is more than just giving insight into the relationship between Hector and Achilles. Homer's use of θυμός is

semantically different in the two similes. The use of θυμὸς in the hawk/dove simile has to do with an animal drive, whereas the θυμὸς in the wolves/lamb simile is driven by the will and reason. Evidence of this is in the diction of each simile. Words like plunging, launching, and screaming surround the hawk/dove simile, whereas the wolves/lambs simile talks about oaths, truces, and uniting minds. Considering this, I argue that Homer is making a statement about the kind of θυμὸς a warrior must have. More evidence of this is in line 268, in which Achilles says to Hector: *remember excellence of every kind*. Recall that the imperative verb μμνήσκεο is crucial here, as Achilles urges Hector to remember the excellence of a warrior. Achilles is not reverting back to violence and battle via an animal drive; he has used a different kind of θυμὸς to explain, rationally and clearly, that the θυμὸς of a warrior requires that issues like the one facing Hector and Achilles must be settled in battle. Therefore, battle is not antithetical to θυμὸς. It is integral to it.