VIOLENT JUXTAPOSITION IN THE SIMILES OF THE *ILIAD*

MANY SCHOLARS have rightly pointed out that one of the principal functions of the similes in the *Iliad* is to lend variety and contrast to the narrative.[1] In a long and potentially monotonous description of a battle, for instance, the similes provide a welcome change of pace and of tone, of setting and of subject.[2] The rapid and intense epic narrative is for a moment magically suspended by the simile's sudden influx of lyric description and feeling, and the reader is given a brief glimpse of those many aspects of the world which are otherwise largely absent from the poem: the world of nature – sea, forest, wind and storm; the world of animals and birds and insects; and the whole immense and varied panorama of peacetime human activity. In this way the similes not only offer respite from the battle scenes but also place those scenes against the perspective of the world at large. That contrast, variety, and a change of pace are basic functions of the similes is all but confirmed by the fact that the *Iliad*, a poem whose subject matter tends to be somewhat monochromatic, has far more similes than the *Odyssey*, a poem whose subject matter is inherently more varied.[3] Moreover, the great majority of the *Iliad*'s similes are clearly designed to take us away from the battlefield: only a handful deal with war.[4]

1S. E. Bassett, "The function of the Homeric simile," *TAPA* 52 (1921) 134 f.; C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and design in the "Iliad"* (Oxford 1930), p. 123; J. A. Scott, *The unity of Homer* (Berkeley 1921), p. 124 f.; cf. A. J. Podlecki, "Some Odyssean similes," *G&R* 18 (1971) 81. In addition to these works and to others cited in subsequent notes, I have found the following works helpful in studying the Homeric simile: M. Coffey, "The function of the Homeric simile," *AJP* 78 (1957) 113-132; J. Duchemin, "Aspects pastoraux de la poésie homérique: les comparaisons dans l'*Iliade*," *REG* 73 (1960) 362-415; H. Fraenkel, *Die homerischen Gleichnisse* (Göttingen 1921); A. L. Keith, *Simile and metaphor in Greek poetry* (Menasha, Wis. 1914); D. J. N. Lee, *The similes of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" compared* (Melbourne 1964); J. A. Notopoulos, "Homeric similes in the light of oral poetry," *CJ* 52 (1956-1957) 323-328; S. Rasia, *De Homericis comparationibus* (Venice 1892); D. F. Rauber, "Some 'metaphysical' aspects of the Homeric simile," *CJ* 65 (1969-1970) 97-103; J. T. Sheppard, *The pattern of the "Iliad"* (London 1922); A. Velsen, *De comparationibus Homericis* (Berlin 1849); P. Vivante, *The Homeric imagination* (Bloomington 1970), p. 80 f.; C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the heroic tradition* (Cambridge 1958); E. G. Wilkins, "A classification of the similes of Homer," *CW* 13 (1919-1920) 147-150, 154-159. Two recent articles on the Homeric simile I have been able to see only in paraphrase: S. Kawashima, *JCS* 13 (1965) 25-32, and H. Wójtowicz, *Meander* 19 (1964) 475-489. In the view of war taken in this article I obviously share somewhat the attitudes of S. Weil in her sensitive essay, "L'*Iliade* ou le poème de la force," *La source grecque* (Paris 1953), p. 11-42. I feel also, however, that her study needs to be balanced by a more dispassionate view of the subject such as that of F. E. Harrison, "Homer and the poetry of war," *G&R* 7 (1960) 9-19.

2In this connection, scholars have pointed out that the majority of the similes in the *Iliad* come in the battle scenes; see Bassett, art. cit. 142; Bowra, op. cit., p. 123; Scott, op. cit., p. 124 f.

3See Bowra, op. cit., p. 123; Bassett, art. cit. 132; Scott, op. cit., p. 124 f.; Wilkins, art. cit. 147; C. R. Beye, *The "Iliad," the "Odyssey," and the epic tradition* (New York 1966), p. 105.

4See Bassett, art. cit. 137; cf. the listings by subject in Wilkins, art. cit., and Fraenkel, op. cit.

This view of the similes of the *Iliad* is certainly correct in its basic outlines, but I feel that in one respect it does not go far enough. For while scholars have duly emphasized that the similes lend needed contrast and relief to the battle scenes, they have not, I feel, underscored sufficiently the *degree* to which many of them contrast with the battle scenes into which they are inserted.

Take, for example, the famous simile describing the death of Gorgythion (8.306 f.):

> μήκων δ' ὡς ἐτέρωσε κάρη βάλεν, ἥ τ' ἐνὶ κήπῳ,
> καρπῷ βριθομένη νοτίῃσί τε εἰαρινῇσιν,
> ὣς ἐτέρωσ' ἤμυσε κάρη πήληκι βαρυνθέν.

What strikes us here is the vast distance between the two situations: on the one hand, a young man destroyed in the prime of life, on the other, a lovely flower being nourished by the spring rains. It seems an effect too bold to be included merely for contrast and lyric relief. Moreover, the lines which immediately precede the simile only heighten the poignancy of the contrast.

We find a similar example at 4.141 f., the simile describing the wound of Menelaos:

> ὡς δ' ὅτε τίς τ' ἐλέφαντα γυνὴ φοίνικι μιήνῃ
> Μηονὶς ἠὲ Κάειρα, παρήϊον ἔμμεναι ἵππων·
> κεῖται δ' ἐν θαλάμῳ, πολέες τέ μιν ἠρήσαντο
> ἱππῆες φορέειν· βασιλῆϊ δὲ κεῖται ἄγαλμα,
> ἀμφότερον κόσμος θ' ἵππῳ ἐλατῆρί τε κῦδος·
> τοῖοί τοι, Μενέλαε, μιάνθην αἵματι μηροὶ
> εὐφυέες κνῆμαί τε ἰδὲ σφυρὰ κάλ' ὑπένερθε.

Again we have the same yawning gulf: on the one hand, the creation of a beautiful artifact to be a royal treasure, on the other, blood flowing from a king wounded by treachery. In this instance, as in the former, we seem to have not only an attempt to lend variety and contrast to a battle scene but also a deliberate effort to juxtapose with the war scene a simile of radically different tone and content.

It is with this sort of violent juxtaposition of opposites in the similes of the *Iliad* that I shall deal in this paper. I hope to show by a series of examples that in the similes of this poem Homer repeatedly and deliberately jars us by the clashing juxtaposition of the lovely with the ugly, the productive with the destructive, the gentle with the violent, the peaceful with the warlike. Later in the paper I shall give my ideas as to why Homer does this; for the present, however, I shall concentrate on establishing beyond a doubt that such is indeed his habit. To this end I have arranged a large number of similes under various sub-headings. Under each sub-heading I shall quote a few characteristic examples and then list in summary form a number of similar passages.

To avoid any misunderstanding, let me repeat: I am not trying to refute the usual theory that the *Iliad*'s similes lend variety to the narrative; what I am saying is clearly an extension, not a contradiction of that theory. Moreover, many scholars have in dealing with one or another passage commented on the disjunction between particular similes and the contexts in which they appear, as will be apparent from my notes to the following section. What has not been sufficiently emphasized in the past, I feel, and what I wish to stress in this article, is the habitual nature of these violent juxtapositions. The frequency with which they occur and their remarkable consistency of

type suggest that Homer's intent in including them went beyond that of merely providing variety and respite in a potentially monotonous battle narrative.

ANALYSIS OF THE SIMILES

A. *Similes which compare war to an agricultural or pastoral scene.*

In all the similes in this section, some agricultural or pastoral scene is placed in the context of war, and not infrequently Homer seems to go out of his way to emphasize the gulf between the two areas thus juxtaposed. A good example of this type is found at 20.495 f.:

> ὡς δ' ὅτε τις ζεύξῃ βόας ἄρσενας εὐρυμετώπους
> τριβέμεναι κρῖ λευκὸν ἐϋκτιμένῃ ἐν ἀλωῇ,
> ῥίμφα τε λέπτ' ἐγένοντο βοῶν ὑπὸ πόσσ' ἐριμύκων,
> ὣς ὑπ' Ἀχιλλῆος μεγαθύμου μώνυχες ἵπποι
> στεῖβον ὁμοῦ νέκυάς τε καὶ ἀσπίδας· αἵματι δ' ἄξων
> νέρθεν ἄπας πεπάλακτο καὶ ἄντυγες αἵ περὶ δίφρον,
> ἃς ἄρ' ἀφ' ἱππείων ὁπλέων ῥαθάμιγγες ἔβαλλον
> αἵ τ' ἀπ' ἐπισσώτρων·

Here the very similarity in movement between tenor and vehicle serves to emphasize the contrast between the work of the man driving the oxen and the bloody course of Achilleus in his chariot. Compare with this example 5.499 f. and 13.588 f., in both of which the threshing floor again appears in the context of fierce battle.

A different image, drawn this time from the sheepfold rather than the harvest, is used in a similar fashion at 16.638 f.:

> οὐδ' ἂν ἔτι φράδμων περ ἀνὴρ Σαρπηδόνα δῖον
> ἔγνω, ἐπεὶ βελέεσσι καὶ αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσιν
> ἐκ κεφαλῆς εἵλυτο διαμπερὲς ἐς πόδας ἄκρους.
> οἱ δ' αἰεὶ περὶ νεκρὸν ὁμίλεον, ὡς ὅτε μυῖαι
> σταθμῷ ἔνι βρομέωσι περιγλαγέας κατὰ πέλλας
> ὥρῃ ἐν εἰαρινῇ, ὅτε τε γλάγος ἄγγεα δεύει·
> ὣς ἄρα τοὶ περὶ νεκρὸν ὁμίλεον....

Whereas at the beginning of this simile the poet suggests the similarity between the swarms of men and the swarms of flies, at its conclusion he seems intentionally to dwell on the springtime and the milk just before plunging us back into the fray. This technique of concluding the simile with precisely those details which will drive home the abrupt contrast is one we shall meet again. With this passage, compare 2.469 f., a very similar image used of the Achaians preparing for battle, and 4.433 f., a passage describing the Trojans' clamor as they marshal for battle (note again the poignant closing line).[5]

[5]One might mention also 5.902 f., where the same image of milk again appears, this time in connection with Ares; but here, of course, the immediate context is one of healing instead of bloodshed.

Somewhat similar to the image of the threshing floor which we discussed above is the famous simile at 11.67 f.:

οἱ δ', ὡς τ' ἀμητῆρες ἐναντίοι ἀλλήλοισιν
ὄγμον ἐλαύνωσιν ἀνδρὸς μάκαρος κατ' ἄρουραν
πυρῶν ἢ κριθῶν· τὰ δὲ δράγματα ταρφέα πίπτει·
ὣς Τρῶες καὶ Ἀχαιοὶ ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι θορόντες
δῄουν, οὐδ' ἔτεροι μνώοντ' ὀλοοῖο φόβοιο.

The gulf between harvest scene and war scene needs no comment.[6] One final example (21.346 f.):

ὡς δ' ὅτ' ὀπωρινὸς Βορέης νεοαρδέ' ἀλωὴν
αἶψ' ἀγξηράνῃ· χαίρει δέ μιν ὅς τις ἐθείρῃ·
ὣς ἐξηράνθη πεδίον πᾶν, κὰδ δ' ἄρα νεκροὺς
κῆεν·

Once more we have an image of fertility and joy in a context of death and destruction. Moreover, the passage recalls the famous image of the gardener channeling water to his plants which was used of Achilleus, also in a destructive context, less than one hundred lines earlier (21.257 f.)

Other examples of the same general type are the following: 4.275 f.: Soldiers with Aiantes moving to battle compared to scene of goatherd leading flocks to safety.[7] 12.421 f.: Men fighting at wall compared to men quarreling over boundary of farmland; actions similar, context and tone radically different. 12.451 f.: Hektor carrying missile compared to shepherd carrying fleece. 13.492 f.: Men following Aineias compared to sheep following ram. 13.703 f.: Aiantes standing close together in battle compared to oxen ploughing field. 17.4 f.: Menelaos standing over body of dead Patroklos compared to cow standing over first-born calf. (Cf. also 14.499, where a man holds up his victim's eyeball "like the head of a poppy"; see scholia for meaning of κώδειαν.)

B. *Similes which compare war to some productive human activity.*

In all of the similes considered in this section, some productive human activity is contrasted with some aspect of war (needless to say, many of the passages considered in the last section could also be included here). We have already seen one example of this type in 4.141 f., the simile describing Menelaos' wound. An even more striking instance is found at 4.482 f., the famous simile describing the death of Simoeisios:

ὸ δ' ἐν κονίῃσι χαμαὶ πέσεν αἴγειρος ὥς,
ἥ ῥά τ' ἐν εἰαμενῇ ἕλεος μεγάλοιο πεφύκει

[6]Cf. 2.147 f., where the soldiers moved by Agamemnon's false speech are compared to a field of grain swept by the wind; the immediate context is not one of war, but the poignancy is still there: the simile reminds us of scenes the warriors have left behind, scenes many will not see again. Cf. also 2.87 f., where the army moving to assembly is compared to bees flying out from their hollow rock and where, as so often, the richness and fertility seem to be stressed.

[7]Cf. 4.452 f., where again a simile in a war context concludes with the shepherd safely out of danger.

λείη, ἀτάρ τέ οἱ ὄζοι ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῃ πεφύασι·
τὴν μέν θ' ἁρματοπηγὸς ἀνὴρ αἴθωνι σιδήρῳ
ἐξέταμ', ὄφρα ἴτυν κάμψῃ περικαλλέϊ δίφρῳ·
ἡ μέν τ' ἀζομένη κεῖται ποταμοῖο παρ' ὄχθας·
τοῖον ἄρ' Ἀνθεμίδην Σιμοείσιον ἐξενάριξεν
Αἴας διογενής·

Again, as in the Gorgythion simile (8.306 f.) considered earlier, the poet heightens the poignancy of the simile by the lines which precede it. Characteristic also is the way the productive purpose in felling the tree is mentioned only shortly before the poet returns to the dead youth: the conventional type of simile comparing a fallen warrior to a fallen tree is thus extended in such a way as to present a striking contrast between the constructive and the destructive. It is a technique we have met before (cf. 4.141 f.) and which we meet again at 13.389 f. (repeated at 16.482 f.):

ἤριπε δ' ὡς ὅτε τις δρῦς ἤριπεν ἢ ἀχερωΐς,
ἠὲ πίτυς βλωθρή, τήν τ' οὔρεσι τέκτονες ἄνδρες
ἐξέταμον πελέκεσσι νεήκεσι νηΐον εἶναι·
ὣς ὁ πρόσθ' ἵππων καὶ δίφρου κεῖτο τανυσθείς,
βεβρυχώς, κόνιος δεδραγμένος αἱματοέσσης.

Another example of the same type of contrast is found at 17.740 f.:

ὣς μὲν τοῖς ἵππων τε καὶ ἀνδρῶν αἰχμητάων
ἀζηχὴς ὀρυμαγδὸς ἐπήϊεν ἐρχομένοισιν·
οἱ δ' ὥς θ' ἡμίονοι κρατερὸν μένος ἀμφιβαλόντες
ἕλκωσ' ἐξ ὄρεος κατὰ παιπαλόεσσαν ἀταρπὸν
ἢ δοκὸν ἠὲ δόρυ μέγα νηΐον· ἐν δέ τε θυμὸς
τείρεθ' ὁμοῦ καμάτῳ τε καὶ ἱδρῷ σπευδόντεσσιν·
ὣς οἵ γ' ἐμμεμαῶτε νέκυν φέρον·

Again, Homer seems to have spun out the comparison in such a way as to bring the element of purposeful productive labor explicitly and expressively into a context of death and destruction. From the same book and the same fight over the body of Patroklos comes the final example I shall quote, perhaps the grimmest of all (17.389 f.):

ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἀνὴρ ταύροιο βοὸς μεγάλοιο βοείην
λαοῖσιν δώῃ τανύειν, μεθύουσαν ἀλοιφῇ·
δεξάμενοι δ' ἄρα τοί γε διαστάντες τανύουσι
κυκλόσ', ἄφαρ δέ τε ἰκμὰς ἔβη, δύνει δέ τ' ἀλοιφὴ
πολλῶν ἑλκόντων, τάνυται δέ τε πᾶσα διαπρό·
ὣς οἵ γ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα νέκυν ὀλίγῃ ἐνὶ χώρῃ
εἵλκεον ἀμφότεροι·

Here, as so often, Homer seemingly goes out of his way to emphasize the violent disjunction between simile and context: common labor for a productive purpose on the one hand, a grim tug of war over a man's body on the other.

Other examples of the same general type are the following: 11.86 f.: Time Trojan

line broken compared to time weary woodcutter goes home to dinner. 15.410 f.: Even battle compared to straight-edge used by carpenter in building ship. 16.212 f.: Close-compacted battle line compared to tightly built wall. 16.746 f.: Patroklos compares fallen warrior to diver who brings in plentiful catch. 21.362 f.: River burning compared to pot boiling over fire as it melts down fat.

C. *Similes comparing war to life of women and children.*

As Jebb has rightly commented, "Special mention is due to a small group of peculiarly touching similes in the *Iliad* — taken, as if for contrast with camp and battle, from the life of children, or of the family."[8] Two of the similes he mentions are especially germane to our inquiry. One is the famous passage from book 12 describing the even battle between Greeks and Trojans (12.430 f.):

> πάντῃ δὴ πύργοι καὶ ἐπάλξιες αἵματι φωτῶν
> ἐρράδατ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἀπὸ Τρώων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν.
> ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὣς ἐδύναντο φόβον ποιῆσαι Ἀχαιῶν,
> ἀλλ' ἔχον ὡς τε τάλαντα γυνὴ χερνῆτις ἀληθής,
> ἥ τε σταθμὸν ἔχουσα καὶ εἴριον ἀμφὶς ἀνέλκει
> ἰσάζουσ', ἵνα παισὶν ἀεικέα μισθὸν ἄρηται·
> ὣς μὲν τῶν ἐπὶ ἶσα μάχη τέτατο πτόλεμός τε,
> πρίν γ' ὅτε δὴ Ζεὺς κῦδος ὑπέρτερον Ἕκτορι δῶκε
> Πριαμίδῃ, ὅς πρῶτος ἐσήλατο τείχος Ἀχαιῶν.

The poignancy of this simile, of course, lies not only in the disparity between image and context (including the familiar contrast between productive labor and war) but also in the explicit reference to the theme of widowhood which is elsewhere so important in the poem.[9] Even more famous is the simile at 15.360 f.:

> τῇ ῥ' οἵ γε προχέοντο φαλαγγηδόν, πρὸ δ' Ἀπόλλων
> αἰγίδ' ἔχων ἐρίτιμον· ἔρειπε δὲ τεῖχος Ἀχαιῶν
> ῥεῖα μάλ', ὡς ὅτε τις ψάμαθον πάϊς ἄγχι θαλάσσης,
> ὅς τ' ἐπεὶ οὖν ποιήσῃ ἀθύρματα νηπιέῃσιν,
> ἂψ αὖτις συνέχευε ποσὶν καὶ χερσὶν ἀθύρων.
> ὣς ῥα σύ, ἥϊε Φοῖβε, πολὺν κάματον καὶ ὀιζὺν
> σύγχεας Ἀργείων, αὐτοῖσι δὲ φύζαν ἐνῶρσας.

Commentators rightly see in this simile a suggestion of the careless ease with which Apollo destroys the wall,[10] but too often they overlook, I feel, the expressive and tragic contrast between the innocent play of the child and the wanton devastation of war.

These similes linking war to the life of women and children are the more surprising to a reader of the *Iliad* in that Homer and his characters themselves so often stress the

8R. C. Jebb, *Homer: an introduction to the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey"* (Glascow 1887), p. 30 f.

9Cf. in this connection 2.289-296, a passage whose imagery is deeply shaded by thoughts of wives and families left behind, perhaps forever.

10See the comments of Eustathius on this passage, and cf. Jebb, op. cit., p. 31; Coffey, art. cit. 127. The comments of Beye, op. cit., p. 46 f., come closer to capturing the full implications of the passage.

distance between these two realms. Heroes in the *Iliad* frequently taunt each other with being "like a child" or "like a woman"; to mention only the most familiar of many examples, we may recall Achilleus' half-scornful, half-tender question to Patroklos at 16.7 f. and Hektor's soliloquy at 22.126 f.[11] In light of these and similar passages, it is the more surprising to find, as in the two similes cited earlier, warriors and their deadly work compared to women and children.

And yet still other examples of the same comparison are found. At 4.130 f. and 8.271 f. the protection given to a warrior is compared to a mother's protection of her child – a natural enough connection, to be sure, but again striking in the distance between context and simile. The same is true of 11.269 f.:

> ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἂν ὠδίνουσαν ἔχῃ βέλος ὀξὺ γυναῖκα,
> δριμύ, τό τε προϊεῖσι μογοστόκοι Εἰλείθυιαι,
> Ἥρης θυγατέρες πικρὰς ὠδῖνας ἔχουσαι,
> ὣς ὀξεῖ' ὀδύναι δῦνον μένος Ἀτρεΐδαο.

Surely, as critics have suggested, there is an element of scorn for Agamemnon in this simile;[12] but surely too in the contrast between the pains of childbirth and the pain of the wound there is the same juxtaposition of the productive and the destructive that we have found elsewhere.

D. *Similes comparing war to scenes of calm in nature.*

Similar in type and effect to the similes we have been discussing are those occasional passages in which the tumult of battle is suddenly broken by a simile describing some moment of transcendent calm in nature. Two striking examples of this type will suffice, 5.519 f. and 12.277 f.:

> τοὺς δ' Αἴαντε δύω καὶ Ὀδυσσεὺς καὶ Διομήδης
> ὄτρυνον Δαναοὺς πολεμιζέμεν· οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ
> οὔτε βίας Τρώων ὑπεδείδισαν οὔτε ἰωκάς,
> ἀλλ' ἔμενον νεφέλῃσιν ἐοικότες, ἄς τε Κρονίων
> νηνεμίης ἔστησεν ἐπ' ἀκροπόλοισιν ὄρεσσιν
> ἀτρέμας, ὄφρ' εὐδῃσι μένος Βορέαο καὶ ἄλλων
> ζαχρειῶν ἀνέμων, οἵ τε νέφεα σκιόεντα
> πνοιῇσιν λιγυρῇσι διασκιδνᾶσιν ἀέντες·
> ὣς Δαναοὶ Τρῶας μένον ἔμπεδον οὐδὲ φέβοντο.

> ὣς τώ γε προβοῶντε μάχην ὤτρυνον Ἀχαιῶν.
> τῶν δ', ὥς τε νιφάδες χιόνος πίπτωσι θαμειαὶ
> ἤματι χειμερίῳ, ὅτε τ' ὦρετο μητίετα Ζεὺς
> νιφέμεν, ἀνθρώποισι πιφαυσκόμενος τὰ ἃ κῆλα·
> κοιμήσας δ' ἀνέμους χέει ἔμπεδον, ὄφρα καλύψῃ
> ὑψηλῶν ὀρέων κορυφὰς καὶ πρώονας ἄκρους

11 For some of the many other examples of this type, see 2.337 f.; 2.872 f.; 7.235 f.; 8.163; 13.292; 20.252 f.

12 On this passage see Whitman, op. cit., p. 159 f., and S. E. Bassett, "The Ἁμαρτία of Achilles," *TAPA* 65 (1934) 57 f.

καὶ πεδία λωτοῦντα καὶ ἀνδρῶν πίονα ἔργα,
καί τ' ἐφ' ἁλὸς πολιῆς κέχυται λιμέσιν τε καὶ ἀκταῖς
κῦμα δέ μιν προσπλάζον ἐρύκεται· ἄλλα τε πάντα
εἴλυται καθύπερθ', ὅτ' ἐπιβρίσῃ Διὸς ὄμβρος·
ὣς τῶν ἀμφοτέρωσε λίθοι πωτῶντο θαμειαί....

In each of these similes we seem to enter a world distant and different from that of war, an illusory world into which Homer draws us only to shatter the illusion by the abrupt return to reality.[13]

With these two similes we may conclude our brief survey, for in many ways they can stand as a summation of the type we have been studying. In their almost supernatural calm they are virtually unique – only 8.555 f. (which comes at a break in the battle) is comparable; but in the contrast between their peace and the surrounding war and in the way Homer seems deliberately to spin them out so as to heighten that contrast, they are typical both of many of the similes we have discussed and of many more that we have not mentioned.

The purpose of the preceding analysis has been to suggest by selected examples both the frequency and the consistency in the *Iliad* of a certain type of simile; I have not tried to cover all possible instances of this type. The reader may at this point wish to object that I have dealt with only a relatively small proportion of the similes of the *Iliad*: even granting that my list makes no claims to comprehensiveness and that other similes of the same type could be found, what about the large number of similes in which we find a more normal or predictable relationship – warriors compared to lions or panthers, the army compared to a storm or to the sea, the battle compared to a forest fire, etc.? To be sure, these more "normal" similes far outnumber the ones I have been discussing, but my contention would be that the very presence of predictable relationships in the majority of the similes renders more remarkable the upsetting of those relationships in the similes I have been discussing. Against the backdrop of normal relationships in the great bulk of the similes, that surprisingly large and coherent series of "abnormal" similes stands out the more starkly. My thesis is that in the *Iliad* these similes containing violent juxtapositions are so common and so striking and their type so consistent that Homer's intent in them must have been more than that of giving variety and lyrical relief. What we must now do in conclusion is to suggest what that intent may have been.

Without in any way labeling the *Iliad* a pacifist manifesto, let me propose that one powerful *effect* of these similes is to increase our sense of the violence and destructiveness of the war, perhaps even at times to suggest its senselessness. It is all too easy to read the *Iliad* from the standpoint of our own war-weary times, and undoubtedly I have read into it some of my own prejudices; nonetheless, I feel that the text of the poem itself gives support at many points for the interpretation I have suggested.

First, there is the evidence of the similes themselves. We have seen that in a large number of the similes of the *Iliad* Homer juxtaposes the violent with the gentle, the destructive with the productive, the ugly with the beautiful. He does this either by choosing similes in which these contrasts are inherent (e.g., war compared to scenes of agricultural plenty) or by developing more conventional comparisons (e.g., a fallen

[13]On 12.277 f., see Whitman, op. cit., p. 149, and Rauber, art. cit. 99 f. Note also their general comments on the gulf that frequently exists in Homer between simile and context.

warrior compared to a fallen tree) in such a way as to introduce such contrasts. Whatever may be the attitude or intent behind these juxtapositions, they are present in the poem – repeated, consistent, remarkably controlled; and one *effect* of these passages is certainly to highlight and emphasize the opposites thus juxtaposed. The grimness and bloodiness of the battlefield are inevitably rendered darker and more tragic by the constant brief glimpses we get in the similes of a world where milk flows, flowers and crops grow in the fields, shepherds tend their flocks, and small children play. Conversely, these momentary glimpses of the world of peace are made more idyllic and poignant by the panorama of violence and destruction which surrounds them.

Moreover, that Homer should use this sort of simile to underline the tragic nature of war is scarcely so daring a notion as it might seem; there is, indeed, ample supporting evidence elsewhere in the poem both for Homer's frequent use of expressive contrast and for his sense of the tragedy of war. Homer's fondness for strong contrasts and his use of them to highlight opposite characteristics and themes in the *Iliad* is too well known to need more than brief mention here. Examples of this technique in the *Iliad* are legion: one need merely think, for instance, of the contrast in character between the petty divine quarrel with which book 1 ends and the deadly serious human quarrel with which it begins; of the contrast in book 6 between Helen and Paris on the one hand, Hektor and Andromache on the other; of the many contrasts involved in the shield of Achilleus – the city at peace contrasted with the city at war, peaceful scenes (18.541 f.) interrupted by violence (18.579 f.), the beauty of the shield contrasted with the ugliness of the fighting in which it will soon be used.[14] Such contrasts are among the most characteristic traits of the *Iliad*, and repeatedly Homer uses them in such a way as to underline one quality by contrasting it with its opposite. It is this same technique which we meet in the similes I have been discussing: just as the gentleness of the Hektor-Andromache meeting in book 6 or the loveliness of the scenes at the end of the shield description in book 18 emphasize the hideous carnage of the surrounding books, so Homer's constant interjection in his similes of peaceful, productive scenes highlights the nightmare quality of the battle scenes in which they appear.

Furthermore, if the technique of violent juxtaposition which I find in these similes is a familiar Homeric characteristic, so, I think, is the outlook toward war which I perceive behind that technique. Is it not clear on many occasions in the *Iliad* that Homer views war with something akin to distaste? Only a poet well aware of the tragedy of war could have told the story of the *Iliad* as Homer tells it, with a frequent emphasis not on the everlasting glory that can be won in war but on the horror and savagery it involves. This is not to say, let me repeat, that the *Iliad* is an anti-war document: clearly at many places the poet views war as inevitable, perhaps even necessary, and as the proving ground of valor. But I think it is also clear from the way he structures the poem as a whole, from the way he handles the motif of honor, from the emphasis he places on the sufferings of Hektor and Andromache and Patroklos, from his deliberate stressing of the savagery of Achilleus' revenge, and especially from his decision to end the poem on a note of mystical reconciliation, that Homer was acutely conscious of the degradation and the waste that war inevitably entails. Homer's awareness of these darker qualities of war becomes increasingly evident as the

[14] On some of the contrasts which are involved in the shield, see Beye, op. cit., p. 143 f., and Sheppard, op. cit., p. 7 f. On the expressive use of contrast throughout the *Iliad*, see Whitman, op. cit., esp. p. 249 f.

poem progresses in the way he chooses to shape his story and his characters; the same tragic awareness is, I feel, also present throughout the poem in the way he emphasizes these darker qualities of war through the use of sharply contrasting similes.

In conclusion, let me make two brief comments on the further implications of this group of similes which we have been discussing. First, if we are right in seeing in Homer's use of these similes an undertone of distaste for the savagery of war, we have one more clear example of how Homer in a highly original manner shapes the materials and techniques of oral poetry into a new and unique poem. Just as in the *Iliad* as a whole Homer has reworked a variety of traditional elements into a poem that in form and outlook is very much his own, so in the similes we have discussed he has taken a clearly traditional device and remolded it to fit his own vision. Nor does the similarity end there: for there is a real parallel between the way the similes emphasize the violence of war by their sudden vignettes of the world of peace and productivity and the way Homer in the poem at large renders the violence of Achilleus the more horrible by the occasional, incredibly poignant scenes of life in Troy which he inserts into his narrative. The poet who uses his similes in such a way as frequently to suggest the tragedy of war is the same poet who reworks the story of the Greek victory at Troy into the tragedy of Achilleus.

We may remark in passing that the same process is also at work in that large group of animal similes, hitherto bypassed, in which Homer contrives by one means or another to throw our sympathy not to the conquering beast of prey but to his pathetic victim. It is clear that the original function of this type of simile must have been to suggest by a simple comparison the speed, strength, and daring of some hero ("he rushed in like a lion," "his strength was like a boar's," "swift as an eagle," etc.) [15] It is equally clear that in the wild beast similes of the *Iliad* this type is frequently reworked so that the victor's savagery is suggested rather than his bravery or so that our heart goes out not to him but to his victim.[16] In the way that this type of simile has been transformed from a glorification of triumphant heroism to a sympathetic, even tragic dirge for the helpless victim and a revelation of the hero's bestiality, there is a close parallel to that group of similes we have been discussing. In each case there is the same highly poignant, highly pathetic contrast between violence and gentleness, between the repellent and the appealing, and in each I detect the same distaste for the potential brutality and the needless suffering which war entails.

Second, let me suggest a similarity between Homer's similes and the imagery of a later poet, a similarity which I feel may perhaps be not entirely accidental and which may throw some light on Homer. Closely akin to the technique and intent we have found in certain Homeric similes, it seems to me, is the technique Aeschylus uses in the imagery of the *Agamemnon* (to say nothing of his other plays) to reveal the moral perversion of the world of his drama. The play is one in which normal relationships and normal values have become hopelessly distorted: a father has killed his daughter, a wife is plotting the murder of her husband, children will kill their mother, innumerable innocents are suffering in a war over a promiscuous woman. One means that Aeschylus uses to suggest this moral chaos and this dislocation of normal human relationships is a pattern of images in which, very much as in Homer's similes, opposites are joined and

15On the background of the Homeric simile, see Bowra, op. cit., p. 115 f.

16For two similes which well exemplify this very common type, see 11.113 f. and 172 f.; on these similes of book 11, see the comments of Whitman, op. cit., p. 159 f.

normal relationships inverted.[17] Thus, to mention just one example, in the agricultural imagery of the play, the sea blossoms with corpses (659), woe burgeons (756), hubris begets and comes of age (763 f.), and a wife describes her husband's murder in the following warped words (1388 f.):

> οὕτω τὸν αὐτοῦ θυμὸν ὁρμαίνει πεσών,
> κἀκφυσιῶν ὀξεῖαν αἵματος σφαγὴν
> βάλλει μ' ἐρεμνῇ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου
> χαίρουσαν οὐδὲν ἧσσον ἢ διοσδότῳ
> γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν.

In this passage[18] the perversion of values in Klytaimestra's mind is revealed by her hideous joining of that which is fertile, lovely, even holy[19] with that which is inherently sterile, ugly, and impious. Similar inversions occur in many other strains of the play's imagery — music, light, dancing, religion, etc.

Aeschylus himself never denied his debt to Homer, and I think it may not be too far-fetched to suspect that his technique of suggesting the far-reaching moral confusion of the *Agamemnon*'s universe by a pattern of inverted imagistic relationships may owe something to those similes of the *Iliad* where the same sort of inversions occur. Conversely, though here we are on extremely thin ice, it may be possible to learn something about the interpretation of the *Iliad* from this similarity between its similes and the imagery of the *Agamemnon*.[20] It seems fairly certain that Aeschylus is consciously suggesting through his imagery that it is a sick world where pain blooms, corpses flower, and a woman rejoices in the bloody rain spurting on her from her murdered husband. Is there in Homer a similar suggestion that there is something unhealthy and unnatural in a world where men killing each other recall workers bringing in the harvest, where a dying youth recalls a flower drinking in the spring rains, and where a god's wanton destruction of human effort recalls an innocent child playing in the sand?

DAVID H. PORTER

Carleton College

17 Among the many studies of this imagery, see especially J. J. Peradotto, "Some patterns of nature imagery in the *Oresteia*," *AJP* 85 (1964) 378-393.

18 On some possible Homeric antecedents of this passage, see W. B. Stanford's excellent comments in *Aeschylus in his style* (Dublin 1942), p. 25 f.

19 On the religious overtones of this passage, see F. I. Zeitlin, "The motif of the corrupted sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 472 f.

20 Cf. the perceptive comments of Whitman, op. cit., p. 117 f., on certain similarities between the imagery of Homer and that of Greek tragedy.