

Epic

Lecture 2

12 October 2009

Topics discussed in this lecture

- epithets
- formulas
- type-scenes
- imagery:
 - ❖ graphic descriptions
 - ❖ similes
 - ❖ metaphors

Homeric language

- Poetic and artificial: linguistic forms are used from different dialects and different periods.
- Influence of metre
- Heroic subject matter

Important questions

- Where do we see the influence of oral poetry in Homer's use of language and style?
- How does metre influence the use of language?
- How does the use of language display Homer's sophistication and artistry?

Epithets I

- Person specific epithets:

- ❖ Odysseus of many devices
- ❖ the swift-footed Achilles
- ❖ the great bright-helmeted Hector
- ❖ the goddess grey-eyed Athena
- ❖ the ruler of men Agamemnon
- ❖ the ox-eyed mistress Hera

- Generic epithets:

- ❖ goddess white-armed ...
- ❖ god-like ...
- ❖ spear-famous ...
- ❖ great-hearted

Epithets II

- darkened water
- oarswept vessels
- wine-blue open water
- golden Mykene

Use of the non-standard epithet

- *Il.* 16.297-98: As when from the towering height of a great mountain Zeus / who gathers the thunderflash (ie usually gathering the clouds!) stirs the clouds dense upon it.

Poetic vs ornamental use of epithets

- *Il.* 1.6-7: 'from the time when they two first parted in strife,
/ Atreides lord of men and shining Achilles.'
- *Il.* 1.488-89: 'But he was still nursing his wrath, sitting by
the swift-faring ships / the Zeus-born son of Peleus, swift-
footed Achilles.'
- *Il.* 22.260, 344: 'Then looking darkly at him swift-footed
Achilleus answered:'
- *Il.* 24.479: '[and kissed the hands] that were dangerous and
manslaughtering and had killed so many'

Formulas

- What is a formula?
- Why would the poet have wanted to use them?
- What is the effect on the audience of the presence of formulas?

Formulas for the breaking of dawn

- *Il.* 8.1: 'Now Dawn the yellow-robed scattered over all the earth.'
- *Il.* 11.1-2 = *Od.* 5.1-2: 'Now Dawn rose from her bed, where she lay by haughty Tithonos, / to carry her light to men and to immortals.'
- *Il.* 19.1-2: 'Now Dawn the yellow-robed arose from the river of Ocean / to carry her light to men and to immortals.'
- *Od.* 2.1 = *Od.* 8.1 = *Od.* 13.18: 'Now when the young Dawn showed again with her rosy fingers.'
- *Od.* 3.1-3: 'Helios, leaving behind the lovely standing waters, rose up / into the brazen sky to shine upon immortals / and also on mortal men across the grain-giving farmland.'

Type scenes I

- Repetition not only on the level of an adjective (epithet) or verse (formula), but also of parts of an episode (type scene).
- Examples of type-scenes:
 - ❖ sacrifices
 - ❖ preparing and eating a meal
 - ❖ single combat descriptions
 - ❖ visits from a god

Type scenes II

- Standard element, but also poetic freedom to:
 - ❖ elaborate
 - ❖ emphasise
 - ❖ condense
- Importance of the context to determine scale and shape of the scene and amount of detail used.

Type scenes: an analysis of four arming scenes

- Watch the underlying sequence and the use of formulas.
- The importance of the context. Why does the poet use amplifications / elaborations?
- What do the various elaborations tell us?
- How is the arming scene sometimes used to foreshadow what is going to happen?
- How is a type scene like this used by the poet for characterisation?
- What does the presence of an arming scene tell you about the type of hero involved?

Paris' arming scene

- *Il.* 3.328ff: 'while one of them put about his shoulders his splendid armour, / brilliant Alexandros, the lord of lovely-haired Helen. / First he placed along his legs the fair greaves linked with silver fastenings to hold the greaves at the ankles. / Afterwards he girt on about his chest the corselet / of Lykaon his brother since it fitted him also. / Across his shoulders he slung the sword with the nails of silver, a bronze sword, and above it the great shield, huge and heavy. Over his powerful head he set the well-fashioned helmet / with the horse-hair crest, and the plumes nodded terribly above it. / He took up a strong-shafted spear that fitted his hand's grip.'

Agamemnon's arming scene I

- *Il.* 11.17-46: 'while he [Agamemnon] himself put the shining bronze upon him. / First he placed along his legs the beautiful greaves linked / with silver fastenings to hold the greaves at the ankles. / Afterwards he girt on about his chest the corselet / that Kinyas had given him once, to be a guest present. / For the great fame and rumour of war had carried to Kypros / how the Achaians were to sail against Troy in their vessels. / Therefore he gave the king as a gift of grace this corselet. / Now there were ten circles of deep cobalt upon it, and twelve of gold and twenty of tin. And toward the opening / at the throat there were rearing up three serpents of cobalt / on either side, like rainbows, which the son of Kronos / has marked upon the clouds, to be a portent to mortals. / Across his shoulders he slung the sword, and the nails upon it / were golden and glittered, and closing about it the scabbard / was silver, and gold was upon the swordstraps that held it.

Agamemnon's arming scene II

- And he took up the man-enclosing elaborate stark shield, / a thing of splendour. There were ten circles of bronze upon it, / and set about it were twenty knobs of tin, pale-shining, / and in the very centre another knob of dark cobalt. / And circled in the midst of it all was the blank-eyed face of the Gorgon with her stare of horror, and Fear was inscribed upon it, and Terror. / The strap of the shield had silver upon it, and there also on it / was coiled a cobalt snake, and there were three heads upon him / twisted to look backward and grown from a single neck, all three. / Upon his head he set the helmet, two-horned, four-sheeted, with the horse-hair crest, and the plumes nodded terribly above it. / Then he caught up two strong spears edged with sharpe bronze / and the brazen heads flashed from him deep into heaven. / And Hera and Athena caused a crash of thunder about him, / doing honour to the lord of deep-golden Mykenai.'

Patroclus' arming scene

- Il. 16.130ff.: 'and Patroclus was helming himself in bronze that glittered. / First he placed along his legs the beautiful greaves, linked / with silver fastenings to hold the greaves at the ankles. / Afterwards he girt on about his chest the corselet / starry and elaborate of swift-footed Aiakides. / Across his shoulders he slung the sword with the nails of silver, a bronze sword, and above it the great shield, huge and heavy. / Over his mighty head he set the well-fashioned helmet / with the hors-e-hair crest, and the plumes nodded terribly above it. He took up two powerful spears that fitted his hand's grip, / only he did not take the spear of blameless Aiakides, / huge, heavy, thick, which no one else of all the Achaians / could handle, but Achilles alone knew how to wield it; / the Pelian ash spear which Cheirion had brought to his father / from high on Pelion to be death for fighters.'

Achilles' arming scene I

- Il. 19.367ff.: 'Raging at the Trojans / he put on the gifts of the god, that Hephaistos wrought him with much toil. / First he placed along his legs the fair greaves linked with / silver fastenings to hold the greaves at the ankles. / Afterwards he girt on about his chest the corselet, / and across his shoulders slung the sword with the nails of silver, a bronze sword, and caught up the great shield, huge and heavy next, and from it the light glimmered far, as from the moon. / As when from across water a light shines to mariners / from a blazing fire, when the fire is burning high in the mountains / in a desolate steading, as the mariners are carried unwilling / by storm winds over the fish-swarming sea, far away from their loved ones; / so the light from the fair elaborate shield of Achilleus / shot into high air.

Achilles' arming scene II

- And lifting the helm he set it / massive upon his head, and the helmet crested with horse-hair / shone like a star, and the golden fringes were shaken about it / which Hephaistos had driven close along the horn of the helmet. / And brilliant Achilleus tried himself in his armour, to see / if it fitted close, and how his glorious limbs ran within it, / and the armour became as wings and upheld the shepherd of the people. / Next he pulled out from its standing place the spear of his father, / huge, heavy, thick, which no one of all the Achaians / could handle, but Achilleus alone knew how to wield it, / the Pelian ash spear which Cheiron had bought to his father / from high on Pelion, to be death for fighters in battle.

Imagery: graphic descriptions, similes, and metaphors

- What is a simile?
- What kind of world is described in the similes?
- Types of similes: short, extended, multiple.
- Why would the poet want to use multiple similes?
- What types of similes are used on the battlefield?
- What is the effect of the use of similes?
- Why are similes used?
- What happens to 'time' when a simile is started?
- How can similes help us with the characterisation of heroes?

- *Il.* 6.289ff.: 'There lay the elaborately wrought robes,
the work of Sidonian / women, whom Alexandros
himself, the godlike, had brought home / from the
land of Sidon, crossing the wide sea, on that journey /
when he brought back also glorious descended Helen.
/ Hekabe lifted out one and took it as a gift to Athene,
/ that which was loveliest in design and the largest, /
and shone **like** a star. It lay beneath the others.'

- *Il.* 18.316-23: 'Peleus' son led the thronging chant of their lamentation, / and laid his manslaughtering hands over the chest of his dear friend / with outbursts of incessant grief. **As** some great bearded lion / when some man, a deer hunter, has stolen his cubs away from him / out of the close wood; the lion comes back too late, and is anguished, and turns into many valleys quartering after the man's trail / on the chance of finding him, and taken with bitter anger; **so** he, groaning heavily, spoke out to the Myrmidons..'

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- *Il.* 4.243-45: 'Why are you simply standing there bewildered, **like** young deer / who after they had tired from running through a great meadow / stand there still, and there is no heart of courage within them?'

- *Il.* 20.165-73: 'From the other / side the son of Peleus rose **like** a lion against him / a baleful beast, when men have been straining to kill him, the country / all in the hunt, and he at first pays no attention / but goes his own way, only when one of the impetuous young men / has hit him with the spear he whirls, jaws open, over his teeth foam / breaks out, and in the depth of his chest the powerful heart groans; he lashes his own ribs with his tail and the flanks on both sides / as he rouses himself to fury for the fight, eyes glaring, / and hurls himself straight onward on the chance of killing some one / of the men, or else being killed himself in the first onrush. / So the proud heart and fighting fury stirred on Achilleus.'

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- *Il.* 1.359: 'and lightly she [Thetis] emerged **like** a mist from the grey water.'

- *Il.* 3.10-14: 'As on the peaks of a mountain the south wind scatters the thick mist, / no friend to the shepherd, but better than night for the robber, / and a man can see before him only so far as a stone cast, **so** beneath their feet the dust drove up in a stormcloud of men marching, who made their way through the plain in great speed.'

- *Il. 16.384-93: 'As underneath the hurricane all the black earth is burdened / on a autumn day, when Zeus sends down the most violent waters / in deep rage against mortals after they stir him to anger / because in violent assembly they pass decrees that are crooked, / and drive righteousness from among them and care nothing for what the gods think, / and all the rivers of these men swell current to full spate / and in the ravines of their water-courses rip all the hill-sides / and dash whirling in huge noise down to the blue sea, out of / the mountain headlong, so that the works of men are diminished; so huge rose the noise from the horses of Troy in their running.'*

- *Il. 15.360ff.:* with Apollo in front of them holding the tremendous aegis, and wrecked the bastions of the Achaians / easily, **as when** a little boy piles sand by the sea-shore / when in his innocent play he makes sand towers to amuse him / and then, still playing, with hands and feet ruins them and wrecks them.'

- *Il.* 16.6ff.: 'Why then / are you crying **like** some poor little girl, Patroklos, / who runs after her mother and begs to be picked up and carried, / and clings to her dress, and holds her back when she tries to hurry, / and gazes tearfully into her face, until she is picked up? You are **like** such a one, Patroklos, dropping these soft tears.'

- *Il. 22.25*: 'The aged Priam was the first of all whose eyes saw him / as he swept across the flat land in full shining, **like** that star which comes on in the autumn and whose conspicuous brightness / far outshines the stars that are numbered in the night's darkening, / the star that they give the name Orion's Dog, which is brightest / among the stars, and yet is wrought as a sign of evil and brings on the great fever for unfortunate mortals. / Such was the flare of the bronze that girt his chest in his running.'

- *Il.* 16.581: 'Anguish for his fallen companion came over Patroklos, and he darted through the front-fighters like a swift hawk who scatters the jackdaws and starlings. So fast, horseman Patroklos, did you charge straight for the Lycians and the Trojans, angered at heart for your companion.'

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