

SIMILES IN A SHIFTING SCENE:
ILIAD, BOOK 11

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IN HIS *ILIASSTUDIEN*, Wolfgang Schadewaldt made clear the pivotal nature of Book 11 in the *Iliad* as well as its tight structure; yet since the appearance of this study there have been few attempts to extend his conclusions by probing the inner structure and fine detailing of the book.¹ Owen as usual ordered the events as they move from scene to scene.² Fenik has identified the typical elements from which Homer has shaped the narrative, and in a later study he summarized his analysis of the careful structuring of the book by comparing it to Book 6:

the style remains the same, only exercised this time at a longer stretch. It is less intense but more varied, less self-contained but more firmly grounded in the plot. In neither case are episodes strung together like beads. Interdependencies bind them. They are absorbed into overriding structures and play on our imagination as a set. We are invited to compare and infer, to ponder each event in relation to the rest.³

Indeed, the organization and interplay of the various scenes and characters have generally been admired—even Leaf praised the style of the book.⁴ My goal in this study is to fit the similes in Book 11 into the poet's plan by showing how they support the themes that Homer has so intricately combined.

In order to understand the functioning of the similes it is necessary to examine each closely as the product of the poet's choice. There is good evidence that the inherited language of early Greek narrative suggested a limited number of subjects at certain common junctures; in some passages the poet chose to follow these prompts, often he made some modifications, and at times he refused the option of using a simile at all. On each occasion he made choices that allowed him to tell his story most effectively for an audience who could appreciate the poet's art because they also knew the traditional simile subjects and their customary placement. In extending

This article is dedicated to Alexander Garvie, in honor of his seventieth birthday.

1. Studies that have been useful throughout this discussion are Schadewaldt 1966; Scott 1974; Moulton 1977; Fenik 1986, 5–21; and Hainsworth 1993.

2. Owen 1946, 110–18.

3. Fenik 1986, 21.

4. Leaf 1900, introduction to Book 11: "... the book, however it was developed, has attained a splendid force and vigour, equal to that of E at its best, and superior in variety of scene and mood, with its alternation of battlefield and camp, of rest and action."

the similes, Homer often manipulated the elements that were commonly repeated in each simile family. As a result, it was possible for the audience to draw upon the tradition that it shared with the poet in interpreting a wide variety of individual similes.⁵

In assessing the use of the similes in Book 11, the main questions to be addressed are:

Why is there such a variety of subjects—especially if Homer is seeking to maintain a focus on his theme?

How does the poet place each simile in order to enhance the meaning of the full passage?

Do similes create cross-references between the sections of the narrative?

I realize that I am largely accepting the book divisions that have defined Book 11 as a unit. It is undeniable that Books 9 and 10 close with going-to-bed and eating scenes, both of which seem appropriate concluding sections; Book 11 then begins with the dawn and the beginning of a new day's activities.⁶ Later, Book 12 opens with a section on the history of the wall—which is a focus organizing the battle scenes of that book. Thus Book 11 is framed (with or without Book 10) as a separate composition by the formal structures that precede and follow it;⁷ my study will focus on the similes in seeking inner consistencies that unify the book's different episodes into a discrete whole and provide a means of understanding the book's proper structure. The similes contribute significantly to a depiction of Agamemnon and the Greeks as superior warriors and of Hector and the Trojans as lesser opponents whose present success on the battlefield derives from Zeus' intervention rather than any inherent valor of their own.

The main structural sections of Book 11 are clearly marked by the sequential entrances of the three main characters, Agamemnon, Hector, and Patroclus—each as the dominant figure in his part of the narrative. In addition, the second section contains subdivisions that are centered on a principal Greek hero:

1. 1–283: the *aristeia* of Agamemnon
2. 284–596: the entrance of Hector
 - 310–400: the wounding of Diomedes
 - 401–488: the wounding of Odysseus
 - 489–596: the fighting of Ajax
3. 597–848: the mission of Patroclus

5. Foley 1995, 93: "an oral traditional register is marked in some tradition- and genre-dependent way as an idiom dedicated to the special purpose of communicating through a particular channel. The narrow focus—or dense encoding—of this idiom permits a correspondingly economical conveyance of meaning, as the performer and audience employ a highly resonant species of linguistic, paralinguistic, and nonlinguistic cues to co-create a rich and complex work with relatively few expressive integers"; see Scott 1974, 126–65; and Foley 1995, *passim*.

6. Compare the similar book openings at 8.1 and 19.1–2.

7. See the summary of positions on the *Doloneia* in Hainsworth 1993, on pp. 151–55. The authenticity of Book 10 is a problem external to this discussion. If it is genuine, then it provides the success that serves as motive for the reinvigorated attitude of the Greeks; the transition to the beginning of Book 11 is smoother. Yet without Book 10 the Greeks can equally well grow eager for battle in response to the cry of Eris (10–12) as well as the challenge of Diomedes at the end of Book 9.

In the first two sections, similes constantly re-enforce the narrative. At the book's opening Homer celebrates Agamemnon, who strives to be a leader and hero in order to reinvigorate a situation that has been disintegrating since the end of the previous day (Book 8); his fighting is successful enough to overcome recollection of his despairing words at the beginning of Book 9. The morning battle is presented as fierce and balanced. Similes enhance the fluid situation: Agamemnon's breastplate is decorated with serpents that gleam like rainbows offering a portent for men (27),⁸ while Hector appears as a baneful star and his armor shines like lightning (62 and 66).⁹ The first battle of the two armies is described in opposed similes of peace and war that reflect the ambiguous conditions on the battlefield: the warriors are like workmen in a wheat field but simultaneously they rage like wolves (67 and 72).¹⁰

The description of the weary woodsman closes the morning's battle and initiates a contrasting atmosphere of raised expectations and resolute fighting (84–93). Agamemnon begins to dominate as he pursues the cruelest and most bloodthirsty mode of combat in the *Iliad*: warriors who vainly beg to be taken alive are ruthlessly slain—even though they were formerly freed for ransom by Achilles; the woundings are physical and gory; Agamemnon decapitates and mutilates the enemy; when he strips men, they are left to be carrion for vultures; his pursuit is ceaseless, and even Hector must be pulled to safety.¹¹

Five similes reinforce this powerful style of fighting. Agamemnon's initial series of killings concludes with (11.113–19):

as a lion easily crushes the gentle young
of a swift deer, snatching them with his strong teeth,
once he has entered into their lair, and devours their tender hearts;
and even if the mother happens to be near,
she cannot give them aid, for a severe trembling comes over her.
Swiftly she darts through the thick brush and woods,
rushing and sweating beneath the attack of the powerful beast.¹²

Agamemnon is described three more times as a lion (129, 172, 239) and once as a raging forest fire (155). In both of the extended lion similes, the description focuses on the helplessness of the victims before the lion's power,

8. Hainsworth (1993, on 27–28) suggests that a *teras* can cause encouragement or dismay; this simile reinforces the actual *teras* reported at 11.4. There is a dark undercurrent to Agamemnon's *aristeia*; Armstrong 1958, 345: "Homer creates here through suggestive association an atmosphere of foreboding uncertainty."

9. In addition, at lines 58 and 60 Hector's companions are given short similes that are customary for warriors.

10. Stanley (1993, p. 360, n. 10) calls these elements "mixed signals." The importance of the similes in the compressed passage describing Hector and the first encounters (56–73) is clear in the collocation of six similes within eighteen lines (three are short)—a density unique for Book 11. There is a similar clustering of four similes at 11.291–309 (one is short); both clusters mark important structural transitions in the narrative.

11. See Friedrich 1956, 61. Hainsworth (1993, on 11.137) points out that Agamemnon's implacability seems characteristic throughout the *Iliad*: "No less than seven of Agamemnon's 46 speeches . . . are introduced as 'stern' or 'pitiless.'"

12. All translations in this article are my own.

thus emphasizing killing the young, breaking up families, and doing physical damage (113¹³ and 172¹⁴). The audience has been acquainted with such extreme similes in their previous experience of early Greek narrative since lions are the most frequent family of similes in the poems.¹⁵ One of the strongest and most violent lions is presented at 17.61–67:

just as a lion, raised in the mountains, trusting in his might
snatches the heifer that is the best from the grazing herd.
Snatching her with his strong teeth he breaks her neck
at first, but then he laps up her blood and all the innards
in his rage. Around him dogs and herdsman
cry out loudly from a distance, but they do not want
to go near, for a green fear holds them

The fire simile at 11.155 also emphasizes the completeness of the destruction; the audience would know several like passages in this simile family from 17.737, 20.490, and 21.12. When Agamemnon strikes off the head of Hippolochus and sends it rolling on the ground, there is a simile to call attention to the vicious oddity of his death (147).¹⁶

After this series of bloodthirsty slayings the simile describing the wounding of Agamemnon, sufficiently painful to cause him to withdraw from battle, is perhaps the most ironic in the Homeric poems: the manslayer is compared to a woman in childbirth (269). In contrast to the preceding similes describing complete and bloody destruction, the destroyer of young deer, thickets, and cattle suddenly becomes a mother figure.¹⁷ The distance between this simile and the brutal descriptions of Agamemnon's killings emphasizes the absurd abruptness of the change on the battlefield—thus highlighting the artificiality of a war scene controlled by Zeus.

The entrance of Hector is presented as a lesser event even though Zeus has specifically promised him a moment of glory. To be sure, he enters the battle as a leader, giving a speech of encouragement to his men and accompanied by four honorific similes.¹⁸ He is compared to a hunter setting his dogs on a boar or lion,¹⁹ to Ares the war god, and twice to a tempestuous wind that whips up the sea (292, 295, 297, and 305):

13. Rabel (1990) and Lonsdale (1990, 58–60) show how the brief story about the warriors' earlier capture by Achilles is echoed in the simile, and Rabel traces the growing ferocity in the fighting to its culmination in Book 22. Both note that this simile is one of the few that attaches to the narrative by focusing originally on the lion (Agamemnon) then rejoins it by turning to the doe (the Trojans).

14. The extended lion similes in Book 11 are drawn from the more physical and bloodthirsty descriptions of the "attack" motif, which are best exemplified in 5.161, 17.61, and 18.578.

15. See Scott 1974, 58–62 and 66–68.

16. Not only is Agamemnon strong, but his armor is sufficiently sturdy to bend Iphidamas' spear "like lead."

17. For discussion of the effect of this simile, see Moulton 1977, 97–99, and Stanley 1993, 133.

18. This is the second clustering of similes in this book, each of which marks a transitional scene in this carefully structured book; see note 10 above. Stanley 134 contrasts the simile-less entrance of Agamemnon at 216–17.

19. See discussion of a traditional form underlying this scene by Fenik 1968, 90–91; he presents an outline of the similar passage at 8.332, which contains a hunting simile.

As when a hunter drives his white-toothed dogs
against a wild boar or a lion . . .

(11.292–93)

. . . like a strongly blowing wind
which falling downward stirs the violet-hued sea

(11.297–98)

This hunting simile, however, lacks the detailed and gory descriptions of the strongest similes in the family, for example, 20.164–73:²⁰

He rushed against him like a rapacious lion
that men are eager to kill, the whole town,
once they have gathered. He ignores them
going on his way, but when one of the young men, swift in battle,
strikes him with a spear, then he crouches down with open mouth,
foam appears around his teeth, and his brave spirit groans in his heart,
and he lashes his ribs and flanks with his tail
on both sides, urging himself to fight.
With glowing eyes he charges forcefully forward
to see if he will kill one of the men or himself be slain in the crowd.

In the same way, the power of the wind simile is diminished in comparison to many other examples familiar to the audience; for example, 15.624–28:

. . . as a fast-moving wave
swollen by the wind from beneath the clouds
falls upon a swift ship; the whole ship is hidden by foam,
the terrible blast of the wind roars in the sail,
and the sailors tremble in fear—for only barely do they escape death.

In contrast, at 11.297 the simile's force is confined to the adjectives "strongly blowing" and "violet-hued" rather than the series of action verbs in the cited parallel. Because wind and wave similes are so common, the audience could recognize the relative weakness of the similes Homer has chosen to accompany Hector's fighting.²¹

Immediately, the promise in Hector's entrance is cut short as a series of Greek heroes occupies the spotlight. The story now no longer presents a series of effortless killings by a cold-blooded, efficient warrior; Hector has to work to gain appropriate visibility in the battle scenes. In addition, the characters from Agamemnon's similes spill over into those that describe the Greeks' resistance. Hector's introductory simile describes a hunter sending his dogs against a lion (292);²² even though Agamemnon has departed from

20. Compare also 11.414, 11.548 = 17.657, 17.61, 17.133, and 17.725.

21. For discussion of the typological qualities of hunts, winds/waves, and gods in similes, see Scott 1974, 72–73, 62–66, and 68–70.

22. Hainsworth (1993, on 11.292–93) feels that this simile "sounds the keynote of the narrative from this point: the Achaeans . . . are hunted beasts" and Stanley (1993, 134) interprets the hunter simile as reversing the series of lion similes in Hector's favor. However, Lonsdale (1990, p. 77, n. 16) notes the strong association between Hector and hounds/hunters. In view of this continuing theme, it seems more faithful to the

the battle, not only does the lion remain the opponent, but the principal character of the simile, the Trojan, is a single human. He may win, but his victory is uncertain since the conflict is at best a battle between equals. When Odysseus and Diomedes appear, this uncertainty is increased as they are compared to two boars that attack hunting dogs; later, Diomedes even describes the Trojans as goats who tremble before a lion (324 and 383). When the Trojans approach the isolated Odysseus, they are again presented as hounds and young men around a boar who refuses to give way, and Ajax comes to aid Odysseus like a lion who scatters cowardly jackals (414²³ and 474²⁴). By the end of the second section, the Trojan attack stalls as Ajax refuses to give way and Hector avoids confrontation. Surprisingly, Ajax attracts a typical simile for a powerful warrior, a rampaging river (492).²⁵ This simile comes after a brief catalogue of the Trojans slain by Ajax—a customary marker of an *aristeia*—and also provides Ajax with the same type of introduction that Hector had earlier received at 299–309. Ajax' effort does not develop into an *aristeia*, but the potential sweep of Hector is stopped. Ajax' strength is described by three juxtaposed similes, each of which progressively focuses on his characteristics as a warrior: he is like a wild beast, a persistent lion, and a stubborn ass (546, 548,²⁶ and 558).²⁷

In the simile concluding the second section, the two armies fight like blazing fire (596), a shared image appropriately closing the two battle sections of Book 11 since the action has been equally intense for both sides.

The two main characters in the first sections are carefully drawn. Agamemnon is a dominating warrior, bloodthirsty in his pursuit of victory; the similes support this characterization economically and effectively. At the same time, the similes of section two picture Hector and the Trojans as weaker opponents, likening them to dogs, goats, a woman or a child, hounds and young men, jackals, oaks and pines, dogs and country folk, and small boys—subjects never used to describe dominating power in Homeric epic. The subjects that traditionally represent the decisive might of a warrior are

developing text to acknowledge that the situation of the attackers in this simile is precarious. The lion/boar is still the strongest animal in the simile repertoire, and any hunter who easily sends his dogs out to kill such a "wild beast" has not been reading such similes as 3.23, 5.476, 12.41, 12.146, 12.299, 13.198, 13.471, 15.271, 17.61, 17.281, 17.725. Some of these scenes end in a draw, and there are a few versions of this simile that place the dogs in the dominant position: 8.338, 11.414, and 17.109.

23. The closest parallels to the boar in this simile are 5.782, 12.146, 13.471, and 17.281 and 725; see also [Hes.] *Sc.* 386–91.

24. For parallels to the spoliative lion, see 3.23 and 13.198. Moulton (1977, 45–49) and Lonsdale (1990, 72–74) describe the connections between this simile and the surrounding narrative, and Hainsworth (1993, on 11.459–88) outlines the parallel structure in the two similes 414 and 474.

25. For parallels to the raging river, see 4.452, 5.87 and 597, and 16.384. For placement in a typical scene, see Fenik 1968, 84–85. In addition Ajax' shield is "like a tower" (11.485).

26. Zenodotos omitted this simile; see Hainsworth 1993, on 11.548–57.

27. These three similes are not as tightly juxtaposed as at 2.144/147, 468/469, and 14.394. There are intervening narrative lines, and the similes do not reinforce the same message. This is a series of similes focused on the same object in the narrative from two different perspectives, Ajax' reluctance and the frustration of the Trojans' effort. There is no good parallel to this loose structure, which for a long time has produced disagreement: e.g., Hermann (1877, 11–23) felt that these juxtaposed similes weaken each other and confuse an audience to the extent that they are probably the product of two poets; see also Mancuso 1915, 56–66.

boars, lions, and rivers—precisely the topics used to describe the Greeks in a series of similes (324, 383, 414, 474, 492, and 548). Before Agamemnon is compelled to retreat and Zeus gives power to Hector, the Greek king receives similes in which the opponents are decisively overwhelmed. After this event, each time another Greek warrior appears in Hector's area, the similes delineate the equalized or even uncertain strengths of the competing heroes, but no simile so precisely as that which begins at 11.474:

The Trojans followed like bloody jackals around a horned stag
that has been wounded in the mountains—a stag that a man has struck
with an arrow from his bow. The stag escapes him fleeing
as long as his blood flows warm and his limbs move.
But when the swift arrow wears him down,
the flesh-eating jackals devour him
in a shadowy mountain grove, and a divinity brings a hungry lion upon them;
the jackals scatter and the lion feasts on the carcass.
In this way then around the wise and crafty Odysseus
did the Trojans crowd, many brave ones, but the warrior
darted forward to keep off the fatal day with his weapon.
Then Ajax came near bearing his shield like a tower
and stood near him. The Trojans all scattered in different directions.

(11.474–86)

This imbalance in strength should not seem unusual. Throughout the *Iliad* Hector is regarded as a warrior whose bravery will be fatal. In the earlier meeting between Hector and Andromache she tells him that his power (μέγος) will kill him (6.407)—a prediction that is fulfilled at 22.96 where the same μέγος compels Hector to confront the charging Achilles. She develops this idea further when she becomes aware that Hector is already dead (22.457–59):

[Achilles] has made him cease from the painful courage
that was his alone, since he never did remain with the mass of men,
but always rushed forward yielding to no man in his power.

Not only does Zeus aid him to gain victories in contests that he would not necessarily win on his own, but Hector is willingly complicit in seeking greater risk. Even the simile for Hector at 12.41 describes a lion whose “courage kills him.”²⁸

Book 11 contains the largest number of similes in the Homeric poems, and their effect is especially powerful since they are concentrated in the first two sections. Even this statement is misleading since multiple similes often cluster around a single event, thus intensifying their force. Agamemnon is introduced with a direct comment on his heroic status by the lengthy arming scene; but this arming scene is balanced by the immediate introduction of Hector through two similes and a catalogue of his fellow Trojans (56–65). Even in this small way Homer uses similes to express the relative merits of the opposed warriors: Agamemnon is given an honorific introduction through

28. This element has no parallel in the surrounding narrative, where Hector is extremely active. The half-line may be added because of its association with Hector.

his actions, but Hector is described only indirectly by similes and a listing of his associates. At the beginning of the second section, Hector's entrance into battle is enhanced by four juxtaposed similes and a list of those he kills; but this lavish introduction collapses as Homer denies him a formal and glorious *aristeia* to balance that of Agamemnon. In fact, the next set of juxtaposed similes accompanies Ajax who steadfastly protects the faltering Greek cause and opens the way for a series of quieter scenes where men consider their responses to the pressures that have blunted the Greek attack.

The final section of the book describes the response of Achilles to the Zeus-driven results of the battle. Patroclus' mission to Nestor is of a totally different nature from the first two sections and highly important to the book's major contribution to the *Iliad*. As the narrative shifts to the calm tent of Nestor, Homer creates a dialogue in which the audience is invited to be present at the meeting of the two Greek warriors. There is no reason to order or rank the battle skills of various kings or to define the momentary shifts in the directions within an ongoing struggle. Similes fall away completely—with two exceptions: Nestor's servant is "like the goddesses" (638) and he describes his own fighting with a familiar simile, "like a black whirlwind" (747). Perhaps Homer is reminding us of the rough-and-tumble world outside this quiet inner scene; if so, the short simile reaffirms the careful reasoning of the two men as they try to bring order to the inconstant scene of warfare that the earlier sections of the book have portrayed.²⁹

Since this book presents a major turning point in the battle, it appropriately includes many heroes—mainly Agamemnon and Hector, but also Diomedes, Odysseus, Menelaus, Ajax, Achilles, Patroclus, Nestor, and others. In contrast, Book 2 focuses on Agamemnon, and Books 21–22 juxtapose the responses of Achilles and Hector to the heroic code's demands. The major problem of Book 11 is maintaining a clear direction in a narrative that threatens to break apart. There are almost too many characters in Book 11, and they seem to get in each other's way. Agamemnon is so powerful a warrior that Hector must be removed for his own safety, but once Agamemnon is gone Hector is given a clear path all the way to the Greek ships. However, this turn in the battle disturbs Achilles sufficiently that he seeks information—thus involving Patroclus in the whole matter. In essence, all these characters are trying to play the role of preeminent warrior that only Achilles can perform—and he is unwilling. Without Achilles, Agamemnon, Hector, and Patroclus are placed in situations where they are called upon to perform actions, but simply lack the abilities and focus of the main hero. As a result, the theme of Book 11 does not depend on one or two individual warriors but rather concerns the complex interconnections of these characters with each other under the plan of Zeus.³⁰

Zeus' intentions and activities are the major unifying forces throughout Book 11. The first two sections (1–283 and 284–596) are organized around Agamemnon and Hector, as is explicitly stated in Zeus' instructions to Hector (11.187–94):

29. See the careful analysis of the scene by Minchin (1991, and 2001, 192–94).

30. I want to express special thanks to the referee for *CP*, who suggested the idea behind this paragraph.

As long as [Hector] sees Agamemnon, the shepherd of the people,
 raging among the front fighters and killing rank after rank of men,
 let him withdraw and order his troops
 to fight with the enemy in the strong conflict.
 But when struck by a spear or hit by an arrow
 Agamemnon leaps behind his horses, then shall I grant Hector
 power to kill until he comes to the well-benched ships,
 and the sun goes down and sacred darkness appears.

Dominating these two contrasting sections is Homer's constant mention of Zeus. The god states his plan clearly when he sends Iris to speak his will to Hector; later, at the beginning of Book 13, Zeus will shift his attention away from Troy, but at this point he is pervasively present. In line 3, he authorizes Eris to rouse the Greeks to battle. The breastplate of Agamemnon is described as being adorned with dark blue serpents, "like rainbows that the son of Cronos has placed in the clouds to be a portent for mortals" (27–28). In a balancing simile, Hector's bronze armor flashes like the lightning of Zeus (66). As the battle is about to begin, Zeus sprinkles the ground with bloody drops of dew and later is reported to be sitting apart from the other gods watching the battle around Troy (53–55 and 80–83). At 163, Zeus takes Hector off to a safe position and warns him to avoid battle while Agamemnon is still fighting. At 336, Zeus, as he continues to watch the conflict from Mount Ida, makes the opposing lines even. Ajax fights like a torrent driven by the rains of Zeus when he enters this carefully managed battle (489–97). Only in the third section, when the scene switches to the Greek camp near the ships, does Zeus fade as an active force, but by this point he has organized the battlefield so that men will carry his intentions forward.

In many ways, Zeus' plan is contrary to the natural course of events. The Greeks have been presented as the more powerful coalition ever since the catalogue of ships in Book 2. In Book 1, Thetis must implore Zeus to strengthen the Trojans if they are to be able to drive back the Greeks; by Book 22, it is abundantly clear—even to Hector—that he will be overwhelmed by Achilles' power. In addition, the Troy story known by Homer's audience already had assigned victory to Achilles and death to Hector; there is no way to change this conclusion. Book 11 participates in the overall development of the epic tale by offering continuing evidence of the Greeks' overwhelming strength as well as the inevitable ending.

The complexities of Book 11 are rooted in its role as a pivotal book in the *Iliad*. Homer gives significant moments to a series of characters: important decisions by major warriors, the results of their actions, and Zeus' control in shifting momentum to the Trojans. All bring pressure on Achilles to re-evaluate his strategy.³¹ The narrative begins with the dawning of a new day as the Greeks are freshly inspired for war (1–2 and 50); but it ends with the despairing words of the wounded Greek warrior Eurypylus (11.823–27):

31. See Schadewaldt 1966; and Austin 1966, 306. Hainsworth (1993, 211) defines the role of Book 11 in the larger structure of the *Iliad*: "The Great Battle of the central Books of the *Iliad* is related in two roughly parallel episodes, 11–12 and 13–15, each beginning with Achaean success and ending in Achaean disaster."

No more, godborn Patroclus, will there be a defense for the Greeks,
 but they will fall back against the black ships.
 For all those who before were our champions
 lie near the ships struck and wounded
 at the hands of the Trojans. Their strength grows greater.

More broadly, the book shows the increasingly urgent situation of the Greeks caused by Zeus' vigorous execution of his plan (begun in Book 8) and the results of the failed appeal to Achilles in Book 9.

Not all commentators elevate the role of Hector to the level that I have suggested. The majority of modern critics base the structure of Book 11 on a series of Greek woundings—of Agamemnon, Diomedes, Odysseus, and Ajax—all leading to the bleak situation that brings Patroclus to Nestor's tent;³² only in Book 12 does Hector emerge to lead his troops relentlessly forward until they break through the Greek wall. But I would argue that Homer has organized Book 11 differently in order to support fully the development of the narrative from the beginning of Book 8 through 18.242, Hector's promised day of preeminence.³³ Agamemnon is portrayed as the center of attention in the first section of Book 11 (1–283), but Hector is given an equal introduction even in that section, and the narrative in a variety of ways foreshadows his coming importance, when he will become the agent of Zeus' plan. In the second unit (284–596), Hector reenters the battle with the introduction of a hero entering his *aristeia* and he is a presence as the Trojans gain strength. That strength is illustrated by the sequential woundings of the Greek heroes; even though they are not the central figures of the main theme, their combined suffering at the hands of the Trojans shows the clear activation of the plan of Zeus. Hector as leader is the only proper carrier of that theme even though he does not accomplish all the killings; he is mentioned thirteen times after he enters the battle under Zeus' promise while the focus shifts between three Greek warriors. In addition, the motivation for the meeting between Nestor and Patroclus is the fear of a general rout of the Greeks. In sending Patroclus to Nestor, Achilles says (11.608–10):

Noble son of Menoetius, dear to my heart,
 now I think that the Achaeans will stand around my knees
 begging; for a need has come which is no longer endurable.

Surely the need he sees is not caused solely by the removal of Machaon from battle, which is the subject of the following lines.³⁴ Even though Patroclus at 648–54 cites Machaon as his only interest, Nestor realizes that Achilles has larger concerns on his mind and easily expands those concerns to include the more widespread weakness of the Greeks in his speech at 655–803.

In a variety of ways, it is clear that this is a carefully crafted book—central to many of the themes in the *Iliad* and filled with incidents that will later

32. Nicolai 1973, 100–101; Fenik 1986, 5–21; and Stanley 1993, 128–36.

33. Schadewaldt (1966, 14–17 and *passim*) presents the fullest argument for this structure.

34. Although at 11.504–15 Homer specifically mentions the Greeks' concern at the thought of losing their healer.

prove of enormous significance. Not only does this book contain the largest number of similes in the Homeric poems but several are among the most forceful descriptions in the simile repertoire. There is a plan in their distribution; they are concentrated in the first two sections of the book and totally disappear in the scene between Nestor and Patroclus (except for the short simile at 747). In addition, simile subjects are often repeated in different scenes, thus suggesting that Homer seeks to create cross-references and invite comparisons within the first two major sections. Four times similes are juxtaposed to intensify their effect. In the first section, not only are similes drawn from the traditional families that accompany warriors in battle but, in addition, each consistently contains the most physical and bloodthirsty alternatives from its simile family. The Greeks are not made weaker in the second section; they are presented as being forced to retreat when confronted by opponents who have the force of Zeus behind their attack. The poet purposely develops these similes to show the undiminished power of the Greek warriors, who thus retain sufficient strength to reverse the direction of the battle in Books 13–15.

Book 11's similes are closely coordinated with the narrative themes, and although there are many individual images that are so vivid that they are themselves memorable as individual poems, as a group their most effective role is to emphasize and organize shifts in the balance and complexity of the hard-fought battle. All similes in Book 11 occur in places where the tradition would have suggested them as one among the alternative ways of continuing the narrative,³⁵ but Homer then chose to use these similes because they enhanced the presentation of his theme and he fortified this strategy by extending them. Clearly Homer made similes an important element in the design of Book 11; exploration of this dense array of similes leads to further definition of their role in Homeric narrative, especially in regard to their placement, the choice of their subjects, and their extension.³⁶

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35. Scott 1974, 83–95.

36. I am grateful for the criticism offered in preparing this study by W. G. Thalmann and the two anonymous referees for *CP*.

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