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A BULL FOR POSEIDON: THE BULL'S BELLOW IN *ODYSSEY* 21.46–50

Recognition of the technical complexity and literary sophistication of Homeric oral poetry[1] encourages close, detailed examination of Homeric similes in their immediate context and in the larger context of the poem in which they occur. The similes offer direct access to understanding and appreciating Homeric poetic technique. Even so, this approach to Homeric poetics is, for the most part, often only taken seriously in the case of the longer or 'extended' similes in the poems. Careful study of even a shorter simile, one all too likely to be dismissed as merely decorative, can be fruitful as well.[2] This paper explores the implications of the analogy in *Odyssey* 21.48–50 between the creaking sound of a pair of heavy doors opening and the bellow of a bull.

At the beginning of *Odyssey* 21, Penelope (with the help of Athena) determines to set for the suitors the contest of the bow, and she descends to the storeroom where the bow is kept. Following a lengthy description of the contents of the room and the construction of its doorway, Penelope uses her key to unlock the doors:

αὐτίκ' ἄρ' ἥ γ' ἱμάντα θοῶς ἀπέλυσε κορώνης,
ἐν δὲ κληῖδ' ἧκε, θυρέων δ' ἀνέκοπτεν ὀχῆας
ἄντα τιτυσκομένη· τὰ δ'ἀνέβραχεν ἠΰτε ταῦρος
βοσκόμενος λειμῶνι· τόσ' ἔβραχε καλὰ θύρετρα
πληγέντα κληῖδι, πετάσθησαν δέ οἱ ὦκα. (21.46–50)

First she quickly set the fastening free of the hook, then
she inserted the key and knocked the bolt upward, pushing
the key straight in, and the doors bellowed aloud, as a bull
does, when he feeds in his pasture; such was the noise the splendid
doors made, struck with the key, and now they quickly spread open.[3]

The scholiasts recognized foreshadowing as one of the regular uses of similes,[4] and the general sense of the analogy in this passage does seem vaguely ominous. But any complexity in the relationship between the tenor of the image (the creaking of the

[1] See, for example, the compelling arguments of P. Pucci, who rejects the assumption of a sharp polarity between oral and written literature (*Odysseus Polutropos* [Ithaca and London, 1987], pp. 26–30).

[2] This may be particularly true in the case of the *Odyssey*. C. Moulton notes that the *Odyssey* contains far fewer similes than the *Iliad*, and that many of them are much shorter. Further, in the *Odyssey*, as compared with the *Iliad*, a higher proportion of the developed similes are directly related to the important themes of the poem (*Similes in the Homeric Poems* [Göttingen, 1977], p. 117). One might expect this to be true, therefore, of the shorter or 'undeveloped' similes as well. In any case, the relative scarcity of similes in the *Odyssey* is, in itself, an argument for giving every simile sufficient consideration, even a short one.

[3] Translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are from R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago and London, 1951) and *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York, 1965). I have taken the liberty of making a few very minor changes. Translation of the verbs ἀνέβραχεν and ἔβραχε in this passage poses a bit of a problem, since 'bellow' in English immediately suggests a bull, whereas the Greek verb is different and is not elsewhere used of bulls. See the discussion of ἀνέβραχεν and βράχω below.

[4] See D. E. Duckworth, *Foreshadowing and Suspense in Ancient Epic* (Princeton, 1933), p. 14 and n. 46.

doors) and the vehicle (the bellow of the bull)[5] may not at first be apparent. The analogy seems merely to illustrate the volume and quality of the sound. The loudness of the noise indicates simply that the doors are huge, heavy, and long unused. We might reflect that these are qualities of the bow as well, and we know that the bow is to prove deadly to the suitors, that the impending contest is ἀρχὴ φόνου 'the beginning of the slaughter' (21.4).

But what is the effect of the poet's selection of this particular image rather than another? What are the implications for this episode in the poem as well as for the poem as a whole? Examination of specific elements in the analogy and their associations in other contexts may help to illuminate the relationship between this image and the thematic and narrative structure of the poem as a whole.

Since Fränkel, at least, scholars have appreciated the fact that the correspondence between a Homeric simile and its narrative context is not limited to a single function or point of comparison. The relationship between simile and context is inevitably multiple and complex.[6] Austin recognizes that, as a result, similes require an act of interpretation from the hearers (or readers) of the poem in much the same way that bird signs or omens require interpretation from the characters in the poem.[7] The dramatic relevance of Homeric similes may be discernible on a deep, rather than a superficial, level of organization, and the similes may even serve a narrative purpose.[8]

Epic poetry achieves its effects using traditional poetic language. Muellner maintains that this language inevitably evokes elements that would have been contained in the social memory shared by the poet and his immediate audience but not by us. This is to say that all Homeric similes, including the longer ones, are, in a sense, 'condensed'.[9] The modern reader must attempt to resurrect, at least in part, this lost context of implicit associations by examining the terms used in an analogy and comparing their use in this instance to their function elsewhere in the text. This process is as necessary—or more so—in the case of the shorter similes as in the longer ones. Austin cautions that the complexity of Homeric symbolic thought indicates that, for modern readers, as for the characters themselves, the danger lies not in over-interpretation but in under-interpretation; that is, in failing to appreciate the full implications of Homeric symbols.[10] While such assertions can in no way be proved, the attempt to reconstruct the implict context of a particular simile, the effort to

[5] I am following M. S. Silk in his understanding of the distinction introduced by I. A. Richards. Silk explains 'tenor' as the underlying idea in a poetic image and 'vehicle' as 'the other idea, the one brought in from outside, the one to which the tenor is, in logical terms, compared' (*Interaction in Poetic Imagery: With Special Reference to Early Greek Poetry* [London, 1974], p. 6).

[6] M. Coffey, 'The Homeric Simile', *AJP* 78 (1957), 117. Coffey is following the view of H. Fränkel, *Die homerischen Gleichnisse* (Göttingen, 1921, reprinted 1977). N. Austin explains the simile as 'a composite picture, an assimilation of one unified structure into another' (*Archery at the Dark of the Moon* [Berkeley, 1975], p. 115). B. Snell notes that Homer's similes 'constitute his only mechanism of describing the essence or the intensity of an event' (*The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought,* translated by T. G. Rosenmeyer [Cambridge, 1953], pp. 199–200).

[7] N. Austin, op. cit., p. 118.

[8] S. Nimis, *Narrative Semiotics in the Epic Tradition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987), p. 42. Nimis maintains that 'coherence at more than one level of linguistic organization would seem to be characteristic of all literature. It is likely that many of Homer's similes perform narrative functions beyond the usual "decorative" ones' (p. 42). He discusses several examples in the *Iliad* in which the element of a preparatory meal before a great battle is taken up in the similes (pp. 22–73).

[9] L. Muellner, 'The simile of the cranes and pygmies: a study of Homeric metaphor', *HSCP* 93 (1990), 66.

[10] N. Austin, op. cit., p. 129.

uncover something of the associations that the image might have evoked in an ancient audience, seems to provide a viable means of approaching an oral text from a literary perspective.

Perhaps the most arresting element in the simile at *Odyssey* 21.48–50 is the verb, ἀνέβραχεν (48), repeated as ἔβραχε at 49. This verb, in simple or compound form, occurs nowhere else in the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* has βράχω 11 times and ἀνέβραχεν once. The verb is used invariably in martial contexts to represent the sound of armor clashing (4.419–20; 12.395–6 repeated at 13.180–1 and 14.419–20; 16.565–6; 19.12–13), of a chariot axle turning (5.837–8), of the cry of Ares (5.858–9; 5.862–3), of a horse falling dead when struck by a spear (16.467–8), of the river roaring as the Trojans are trapped in it by Achilles (21.8–9), and of the sound that the earth makes when the gods fight (21.386–7). The sound represented by the verb can be directly associated with death (12.395–6, 13.180–1, 16.467–8) or a man's fall (14.419–20). In all other instances the sound closely precedes the slaughter of warriors. The only instance of ἀναβράχω occurs at 19.12–13 when the armor of Achilles clashes as Thetis gives it to him. The sound makes the Myrmidons tremble. They are afraid even to look at the armor. Achilles' return to the fighting, of course, spells death for many Trojans. Perhaps the presence of the compound form of the verb here and only here signifies that the greatest slaughter is to follow.

In any case, the verbs βράχω and ἀναβράχω appear to have exclusively martial associations. Nowhere do they represent the sound that bulls or doors make. In the *Odyssey*, a bull's bellow is heard only here at 21.48. But in the *Iliad*, the sound of bulls or cattle is represented by the verbs στενάχω (e.g.16.486–7), μυκάομαι (e.g.21.236–7), and ἐρεύχομαι (e.g.20.402–3)—never ἀναβράχω or βράχω. The choice of these verbs for the analogy between the sound of opening doors and the bellow of a bull gives the image in *Odyssey* 21.48–50 distinctly deadly or ominous associations.

The κληῖς in the tenor of the simile may reinforce the suggestion of imminent destruction contained in the verbs. Penelope inserts the κληῖς (ἐν δὲ κληῖδ' ἧκε 'she inserted the key' [21.47]) and the doors are described as πληγέντα κληῖδι 'struck with the key' (21.50). The *Odyssey*, with its numerous domestic scenes, contains many descriptions of doors, and the κληῖς is often mentioned, especially when doors are being shut (see, for example, *Od.* 1.442 or 21.241). But this particular key is given peculiar emphasis. It is described as εὐκαμπέα 'artfully curved', καλή 'beautiful' as well as χαλκείη 'bronze' and κώπη δ' ἐλέφαντος ἐπῆεν 'it had an ivory handle upon it' (21.6–7). The repetition of the word in the analogy calls attention to the κληῖς and its power to precipitate the sound.

It may be worth noting, therefore, that κληῖς also means 'collarbone'. In this sense, the κληῖς in the *Iliad* is starkly associated with death. It marks the spot which is μάλιστα δὲ καίριος 'most fatal' (8.326). Hector, clad in the armor he stripped from Patroclus, is exposed and vulnerable only at his κληῖδες 'collarbones', the spot where ψυχῆς ὤκιστος ὄλεθρος 'destruction of life comes most swiftly' (22.324–25). And it is in this spot that Achilles strikes the mortal blow (22.326–27). With only one exception, the κληῖς as 'collarbone' occurs in the *Iliad* only in the context of a deadly blow to a warrior in that spot (5.146, 579; 17.309; 21.117).[11] In *Odyssey* 21 the κληῖς precipitates the sound of the doors and, therefore, the analogy to the bull's bellow. Connoting at

[11] The exception occurs in *Iliad* 8. Hector strikes a direct blow with a rock to the κληῖς of Teucer, that is, to the most fatal spot (8.326), but Teucer survives and is carried to safety. Hector's distinction as the only warrior ever to strike another in the κληῖς and yet fail to kill him may be an important element in his characterization.

once 'key' and the 'most fatal' spot for a warrior to be struck, the κληῖς may strengthen the deadly associations called up by the verbs ἀναβράχω and βράχω.

Moreover, Penelope, inserting the κληῖς, is described as ἄντα τιτυσκομένη (21.48). This is a phrase used of taking aim in archery.[12] And it is the very phrase used later to describe Odysseus when he does succeed in stringing the bow and letting an arrow fly (*Od.* 21.421). The parallel serves not only to link Penelope's actions to those of Odysseus but also to reinforce the deadly overtones of the analogy between the creaking of the storeroom doors and the bellowing of a bull.

While ἀναβράχω, βράχω, κληῖς, and ἄντα τιτυσκομένη set the tone of the analogy, the choice of a ταῦρος for the vehicle helps to clarify the implications of the comparison. Both epics, of course, are filled with animal similes and descriptions of animals of one kind or another, and the *Iliad* contains numerous and varied references to bulls. The *Odyssey*, by contrast, refers to bulls comparatively infrequently. And bulls, in this poem, carry special significance.

In the *Iliad*, bulls appear as sacrificial victims to Poseidon (11.727–8; 20.402–3), to Apollo (1.40–1; 1.315–16), to Athena (2.549–50), and to the river god Scamander (21.130–1). They are also regularly depicted as the victims of lions (16.486–7, 17.541–2; 18.579–80). Their hides are used for shields and helmets (7.222–3; 10.257–8; 13.160–1; 16.359–60;17.388–9). In similes, Agamemnon, pre-eminent among his men, is likened to a bull visible among the herd (2.480–1), and the river god Scamander bellows like a bull (μυκάομαι 21.237).

In contrast, the *Odyssey* contains just nine references to bulls. Eight of the nine refer to a bull or bulls as sacrificial victims exclusively to Poseidon and to no other god (1.24; 3.5–6; 3.8; 3.177–8; 11.130–1; 13.180–1; 13.184; 23.277–8). The only exception occurs at *Odyssey* 21.48. The bull in this simile may be best understood in the context of the bull's function as a sacrificial victim to Poseidon, because the *Odyssey* (unlike the *Iliad*) gives us no other context for it. Given the restricted function of bulls in this poem, the choice of a bull for the analogy here is likely to make the audience think generally of Poseidon and sacrifice, and even, possibly, more specifically of the bull which Elpenor has told Odysseus that he must sacrifice to Poseidon (*Od.* 11.130–1). The image serves, in a subtle way, to prefigure and to substitute for this sacrifice, which never actually occurs in the poem.[13]

The context of sacrifice helps to account for another element in the analogy. The sound of the doors opening is likened to the bellow that a bull makes *while grazing* (τὰ δ'ἀνέβραχεν ἠΰτε ταῦρος/βοσκόμενος λειμῶνι· 'the doors bellowed aloud, as a bull does,/when he feeds in his pasture' [21.48–9]). This is not a casual or meaningless detail. The bull is described as grazing because this helps to characterize him as an imminent victim and, as we shall see, to connect his status with that of the suitors.

In similes in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the act of grazing, specifically represented by the verb βόσκω in the middle voice, is a regular posture of imminent

[12] J. Russo, M. Fernandez-Galiano and A. Heubeck, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, vol. III: *Books 17–24* (Oxford, 1992), p. 153, who cite 21.421 as an example.

[13] Pre-figuring and substitution for events outside the scope of the epics apppear to be commmon to Homeric technique. One might compare, for example, the way in which the breaching of the Greek fortifications in *Iliad* 12 prefigures and substitutes for the breaching of the Trojan wall itself, which will not occur in the poem, or the way in which the description of Achilles' extravagant mourning for Patroclus prefigures and substitutes for a depiction of Achilles' own death, which similarly does not occur within the poem. For the latter, see e.g. M. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore and London, 1987), pp. 270–1; R. Janko, *A Commentary on the Iliad*, vol. IV: *Books 13–16* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 408–17.

victims. The verb occurs in just three similes in the *Iliad*, and always in this context: Diomedes is likened to a lion breaking the neck of a grazing (βοσκομενάων) ox or heifer (5.161–162); Hector is likened to an eagle charging against a flock of grazing (βοσκομενάων) birds (15.690–691); and Menelaos is likened to a lion breaking the neck of a grazing (βοσκομένης) cow (17.61–62).

In the *Odyssey*, the verb is found in two similes. In one of these, which occurs twice, the verb similarly expresses the action of the imminent victim. In *Odyssey* 4, Menelaos uses a vivid simile to describe the suitors' shameful abuse of Odysseus' house and possessions, and to predict Odysseus' return and vengeance:

ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ κρατερόφρονος ἀνδρὸς ἐν εὐνῇ
ἤθελον εὐνηθῆναι ἀνάλκιδες αὐτοὶ ἐόντες.
ὡς δ'ὁπότ' ἐν ξυλόχῳ ἔλαφος κρατεροῖο λέοντος
νεβροὺς κοιμήσασα νεηγενέας γαλαθηνοὺς
κνημοὺς ἐξερέῃσι καὶ ἄγκεα ποιήεντα
βοσκομένη, ὁ δ' ἔπειτα ἑὴν εἰσήλυθεν εὐνήν,
ἀμφοτέροισι δὲ τοῖσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφῆκεν
ὡς 'Οδυσεὺς κείνοισιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσει. (4.333–40)

Oh, for shame, it was in the bed of a bold and strong man
they wished to lie, they themselves being all unwarlike.
As when a doe has brought her fawns to the lair of a lion
and put them there to sleep, they are newborn and still suckling,
then wanders out into the foothills and the grassy corners,
grazing there, but now the lion comes back to his own lair
and visits a shameful destruction on both mother and children;
so Odysseus will visit shameful destruction on these men.

Menelaos explicitly identifies the doe and fawns with the suitors and Odysseus with the lion. Here, too, we see the grazing motif as a prelude to victimization. The simile is slightly illogical in that the doe is described as being outside of the ξύλοχος 'thicket', βοσκομένη ἄγκεα ποιήεντα 'grazing grassy gorges' (4.337–338). And yet she, too, is included in the slaughter for,

ὁ δ' ἔπειτα ἑὴν εἰσήλυθεν εὐνήν,
ἀμφοτέροισι δὲ τοῖσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφῆκεν (4.338–9)

when the lion comes back to his own lair
he visits a shameful destruction on both mother and children[14]

If this outcome stretches credibility, nevertheless it serves to underscore the role of βόσκω in the middle voice to denote the imminent victim. Odysseus repeats the simile word for word in *Odyssey* 17, when he relates Menelaos' analogy to Penelope (17.124–131). This simile directly associates the suitors with the grazing imminent victim.[15]

In similes in both poems, the act of grazing is the act of an imminent victim, and Menelaos' simile specifically connects that act with the suitors' shameless consumption of Odysseus' possessions. The only other instance of βόσκω in a simile occurs in the door analogy at *Odyssey* 21.48–50. This grazing bull, then, may recall not only Elpenor's prophecy of the bull Odysseus must sacrifice to Poseidon

[14] I concur with Lattimore's translation of ἀμφοτέροισι as 'both mother and children'. Although 'both fawns' is possible, no mention has been made of two fawns. Perhaps there were three. (Deer can have triplets.)

[15] Penelope's description of her dream (*Od.* 19.535–53) also includes the detail of the geese eating, although the verb is ἔδω (19.536) and not βόσκω.

(*Od.* 11.130–131), but also Menelaos' prediction of Odysseus' return and vengeance on the suitors.

Another element in the analogy suits both contexts as well. Both Odysseus' eventual sacrifice of a bull to Poseidon and the suitors' imminent slaughter are consistent with the fact that the bull is βοσκόμενος λειμῶνι 'grazing in a meadow' (*Od.* 21.49). Certainly, a meadow is a likely place for a bull to graze. But the poet is currently describing events on Ithaca and has already made a point of telling us that there are no λειμῶνες on the island. Although Athena (in disguise) maintains that Ithaca is αἰγίβοτος δ' ἀγαθὴ καὶ βούβοτος 'good for feeding goats and cattle' (*Od.* 13.246), in *Odyssey* 4 we learned that the island has, in fact, no meadows. Telemachos tells Menelaos:

ἐν δ' Ἰθάκῃ οὔτ' ἄρ δρόμοι εὐρέες οὔτε τι λειμών·
αἰγίβοτος, καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπήρατος ἱπποβότοιο.
οὐ γάρ τις νήσων ἱππήλατος οὐδ' εὐλείμων,
αἵ θ' ἁλὶ κεκλίαται· Ἰθάκη δέ τε καὶ περὶ πασέων. (*Od.* 4.605–8)

There are no wide courses in Ithaca, there is no meadow;
a place to feed goats; but lovelier than a place to feed horses;
for there is no one of the islands that has meadows for driving horses;
they are all sea slopes; and Ithaca more than all the others.

The presence of a λειμών in the simile is, therefore, consistent with the fact that Odysseus will not sacrifice to Poseidon while he is on Ithaca but instead must travel far away to some inland place (*Od.* 11.119–31) where, if one may speculate, there are likely to be λειμῶνες.

And the reference to a λειμών may reinforce the simile's ominous implications for the suitors. There are λειμῶνες on Calypso's island (5.71–2), on the island of the Phaeacians (6.291–2), and on the uninhabited island near to the island of the Cyclops (9.131–2). And the Sirens sit in a λειμών as they lure men to their deaths (12.44–5; 12.158–9). But the only other λειμών in the poem is the meadow of Asphodel in the Underworld (11.538–9; 11.572–3), where the souls of the suitors arrive after the slaughter (24.12–13). The reference to a λειμών in the simile at *Odyssey* 21.48–50, then, may also prefigure that meadow in the Underworld in which the souls of the suitors will soon find themselves.

Since the act of feeding is itself a figure for the role of the imminent victim, it may be useful to compare the analogy to two previous references to Agamemnon's murder. In *Odyssey* 4, Menelaos relates how Aigisthos killed Agamemnon while he was feasting:

τὸν δ' οὐ εἰδότ' ὄλεθρον ἀνήγαγε, καὶ κατέπεφνε
δειπνίσας, ὥς τίς τε κατέκτανε βοῦν ἐπὶ φάτνῃ. (*Od.* 4.534–5)

he led him in all unsuspicious of death, and feasted him
and killed him feasting, as one strikes down an ox at his manger.

In *Odyssey* 11 the ghost of Agamemnon repeats the second line of this in denying Odysseus' suggestion that he might have been killed in a shipwreck, raid, or battle (11.411). Although the verb is not βόσκω, the underlying idea of feeding as a precursor to slaughter, of the consumer as one who is about to be consumed, seems the same.[16] The image in *Odyssey* 21.48–50 may therefore mark a kind of reversal. Not the returning 'host' but the devouring suitors are to be the victims this time.

[16] L. Muellner, discussing the simile likening Hector to an eagle attacking a flock of grazing birds (*Il.* 15.688–95), compares *Od.* 4.534–5 = 11.411–12 with *Il.* 5.161–4 and concludes that the

Since Agamemnon is likened to a βοῦς 'ox' (Od. 4.535 = 11.411) rather than a ταῦρος 'bull', this analogy might seem incompatible with a discussion of the associations for ταῦρος. And yet, the contextual ranges of the two words appear to overlap. A ταῦρος is, in fact, a ταῦρος βοῦς, as one is referred to at *Il.* 17.389, and there appears to be some continuity between the associations for cattle and for bulls. They can be understood to be members of the same category and possessed of certain shared characteristics and associations, as well as of certain distinctive individual characteristics.[17]

Both can be used to figure the same human act. Thus, for example, in *Iliad* 17 Automedon kills Aretos the way a man slaughters an ox (βοῦς) with a sharp axe (*Il.* 17.520–522). Then, splattered with blood, Automedon mounts his chariot:

ἂν δ' αὐτος ἔβαινε πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὕπερθεν
αἱματόεις ὥς τίς λέων κατὰ ταῦρον ἐδηδώς. (*Il.* 17.540–2)

He himself mounted [the chariot], the blood running
from hands and feet, as on some lion who has eaten a bull.

Here Automedon's victim is likened first to a βοῦς and then to a ταῦρος.

It may be reasonable to compare, therefore, this description of Automedon in *Iliad* 17 with another similar analogy in which the victim is a βοῦς rather than a ταῦρος. In *Odyssey* 22, after he has killed the suitors, Odysseus is compared to a lion who has eaten a βοῦς 'ox' and departs spattered with blood. Eurykleia finds Odysseus, who is:

αἵματι καὶ λύθρῳ πεπαλαγμένον ὥς τε λέοντα,
ὅς ῥά τε βεβρωκὼς βοὸς ἔρχεται ἀγραύλοιο·
πᾶν δ' ἄρα οἱ στῆθός τε παρήϊά τ' ἀμποτέρωθεν
αἱματόεντα πέλει, δεινὸς δ' εἰς ὦπα ἰδέσθαι·
ὥς Ὀδυσεὺς πεπάλακτο πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὕπερθεν·. (*Od.* 22.402–6)

spattered over with gore and battle filth, like a lion
who has been feeding on an ox of the fields, and goes off
covered with blood, all his chest and his flanks on either
side bloody, a terrible thing to look in the face; so
now Odysseus' feet and the hands above them were spattered.

This image directly associates the suitors with a βοῦς 'ox', and may recall an earlier image of the suitors. Panicking as they are about to be slaughtered, the suitors are likened to a herd of stampeding cattle:

passages have different connotations. The description of Agamemnon's slaughter implies that it was 'a perversion: unsuspecting, he was butchered like an animal being sacrificed for a dinner such as the one he was attending at the time (not an inappropriate return for the crime of Atreus). In the battle narrative of the *Iliad*, however, the implications are not the same: that the cow or calf is feeding when killed by a predator is a pathetic detail marking its unsuspecting defenselessness—though the pathos is perhaps distanced and the scene ennobled by an ironical contrast of herbivorous bovine with carnivorous predator, each in the process of getting food' (L. Muellner, *HSCP* 93 [1990], 69–70).

[17] L. Muellner identifies similarly associated groupings of animals and argues that 'The traditional poet worked with a system of groups, each comprising not more than three members: geese, cranes, and swans; eagle, vulture, or falcon; jackdaws, starlings, or rock-dove; bees or wasps; lions or boars. Each associative group has conventional characteristics in common that suits it to certain contexts; some member of the group may have distinctive characteristics that suit it to some contexts but not others' (L. Muellner, *HSCP* 93 [1990], 72). Aeschylus, at least, seems to have understood the *Odyssean* function of the bull as a sacrificial animal as an appropriate image for Agamemnon's story. In the *Agamemnon*, envisioning Agamemnon's murder, Cassandra refers to him as a bull (*Ag.* 1125–6).

οἱ δ' ἐφέβοντο κατὰ μέγαρον βόες ὡς ἀγελαῖαι·
τὰς μέν τ' αἰόλος οἶστρος ἐφορμηθεὶς ἐδόνησεν
ὥρῃ ἐν εἰαρινῇ, (*Od.* 22.299–301)

and they stampeded about the hall, like herds of cattle
set upon and driven wild by the darting horse fly
in the spring season,

The close similarities between the role of cattle in general and of bulls in particular as consumed victims and as images for Odysseus' victims may help us to understand the reference to the grazing bull at *Odyssey* 21.48–50 as not only an omen of Odysseus' future sacrifice to Poseidon, but also as an intimation of the suitors' imminent destruction.

The image of Odysseus as a bloodied lion who has eaten a βοῦς 'ox' may also recall the description in *Odyssey* 9 of Polyphemos feasting on Odysseus' companions. Polyphemos kills two of them and eats them entirely:

ἤσθιε δ' ὡς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος, οὐδ' ἀπέλειπεν,
ἔγκατά τε σάρκας τε καὶ ὀστέα μυελόεντα. (*Od.* 9.292–3)

Like a lion reared in the hills, without leaving anything,
ate them, entrails, flesh and the marrowy bones alike.

Polyphemos and Odysseus are the only two bloody lions in the *Odyssey*, and this association in the similes dramatically reinforces the savagery of *Odyssey* 22. Odysseus combines the righteous restoration of order with the violent savagery necessary to accomplish it.[18]

In addition, the association between Odysseus and Polyphemos may extend to their respective roles as reluctant hosts. In *Odyssey* 9, Odysseus and his companions, waiting in the cave for Polyphemos' return, but helping themselves to Polyphemos' provisions while doing so (9.231–3), are not so very unlike the suitors, who are helping themselves to the possessions of the absent Odysseus. In the case of Polyphemos, Poseidon is unequivocally on the side of the wronged 'host', however harshly the opportunistic 'guests' are treated once the absent 'host' returns. Odysseus' subsequent role as the returning 'host' confronting his abusive 'guests', the suitors, may even begin to elicit a shred or two of sympathy from Poseidon, in spite of his major grievance against Odysseus.

The two actions of Odysseus that the simile foreshadows—his sacrifice of a bull to Poseidon and his slaughter of the suitors—may not, then, be entirely unrelated. Odysseus' proper punishing of his greedy 'guests' may be seen as a symbolic restoration of the balance upset by his and his companions' violation of the rights of their 'host' Polyphemos. The suitors' death, then, becomes, in effect, a kind of preliminary appeasement to Poseidon, which will only be completed when Odysseus performs the sacrifice described by Elpenor in *Odyssey* 11.

The creaking door–bellowing bull simile may fit a pattern in which peaceful similes depict moments at which a battle is about to begin,[19] but by incorporating the two thematic strands—Odysseus' appeasement of Poseidon and his revenge on the suitors—the image may even serve as a sort of implicit substitute for a sacrifice the

[18] W. Magrath, 'Progression of the Lion Simile in the *Odyssey*', *CJ* 77 (1982), 210–211. Magrath argues that the similes in *Odyssey* 22 remind the audience that Odysseus 'is the hero both of harmony and of violence, of culture as a figure of *charis* and of nature as a beast' (p. 212).

[19] W. C. Scott, *The Oral Nature of the Homeric Simile*, *Mnemosyne* (Leiden, 1974), suppl. 28, p. 122. Scott also cites 21.48, 21.406, and 21.411 as examples of this.

audience might expect Odysseus to make prior to engaging in battle with the suitors. Greeks typically made sacrifices prior to military enterprises because they felt that the rituals gave them strength,[20] and sacrifice appears to have been inextricably linked to the exercise of political power.[21] Odysseus cannot, of course, make a sacrifice at this juncture,[22] but as the deadly weapon is about to be brought into play, the poet provides the audience with a preliminary hint of sacrifice in symbolic form.[23]

The sound of the creaking doors may be understood as one of a series of inarticulate ominous sounds that augur Odysseus' successful restoration of order on Ithaca. Others include the barking of Eumaios' dogs at Odysseus' arrival (14.30), Telemachos' sneeze (17.541), the singing of the bowstring as Odysseus tests it (21.410), and the thundering portents of Zeus (20.103 and 21.413).[24]

It is, however, singularly appropriate that the sound manifests itself to Penelope, for she alone of all the characters in the poem is the most sensitive to aural messages. At her very first mention in the poem, Penelope is described as listening to Phemios singing of the Achaians' bitter homecoming from Troy (1.328ff.). Our first glimpse of Penelope, then, emphasizes her aural understanding (φρεσὶ σύνθετο 'she heeded in her thoughts' 1.328) and her reception of events through her sense of hearing.[25]

Throughout the poem, Penelope learns of major events by means of aural messages. She hears of Telemachos' departure indirectly, from Eurykleia (2.373–6, 4.746–9), and from Medon of the suitors' plot to destroy Telemachos (4.675ff., 16.411–12). She regrets that she never heard Telemachos leave (4.728). If she had

[20] M. Bloch, *Prey into Hunter* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 26. Bloch argues for a cross-cultural view of sacrifice as dependent on political, economic, and military circumstances. The re-consuming of the sacrificed animal's vitality could be seen as a 'legitimation of outwardly directed aggression' (pp. 24–5).

[21] M. Detienne, 'Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice', in M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant (eds; trans. by P. Wissing), *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks* (Chicago and London, 1989), p. 3. Detienne maintains that 'political power cannot be exercised without sacrificial practice. Any military or political undertaking—a campaign, engagement with the enemy, the conclusion of a treaty, works commissioned on a temporary basis, the opening of the assembly, or the assumption of office by the magistrates—each must begin with a sacrifice followed by a meal' (p. 3).

[22] See P. Vidal-Naquet, who understands Ithaca as a society in crisis and explains that sacrifice is 'both the sign of the crisis and the means of its resolution'. He argues that the suitors do not, in fact, actually sacrifice ('Land and Sacrifice in the *Odyssey*: A Study of Religious and Mythical Meanings', in R. L. Gordon [ed.], *Myth, Religion, and Society* [Cambridge, 1981], p. 90).

[23] Sacrifice might have added implications for Penelope. Ritually slaughtered meat may have been the only meat available for consumption. Detienne argues for 'the absolute coincidence of meat-eating and sacrificial practice. All consumable meat comes from ritually slaughtered animals' (M. Detienne, op. cit., p. 3). If women, lacking political power, were consequently excluded from sacrifices and only entitled to eat meat as a result of their husbands' or fathers' participation, Odysseus' successful deployment of the bow would turn Penelope back into a carnivore after 20 years of vegetarianism. But see R. Osborne, who rejects Detienne's arguments and maintains that 'women were not as a rule excluded from sacrificial meat' ('Women and Sacrifice in Classical Greece', *CQ* 43 [1993], 392–405).

[24] E. K. Borthwick identifies the sound of Odysseus' bowstring and its comparison to the note of a swallow as 'one of the series of sound omens which at important junctures confirm the impending return of Odysseus'. He lists Telemachos' sneeze at 17.541, Zeus' thunder at 20.103 and 21.413, the mill-grinder's prayer at 20.120, and the thunder bolt at 24.539, which concludes the conflict ('Odysseus and the Return of the Swallow', *Greece and Rome* 35 [1988], 15–16). Surprisingly, Borthwick does not, however, also include the sound of the storeroom doors opening at 21.48–9.

[25] One may contrast the first mention of Helen which emphasizes her physical appearance (*Od.* 4.121ff.)

heard, she maintains, he would have had to stay (4.732). She learns of Telemachos' return not directly (as the swineherd does) but indirectly, via messages (15.40–2, 16.130–1, 16.328–9).

Even news of events in her own house comes to Penelope indirectly. She hears that the stranger has been struck in her halls (17.492–3). She receives from Eumaios the stranger's message that she should wait to ask him for news of Odysseus (17.582). She places her chair outside the door to the hall so that she can overhear the men talking within (20.387–9). She learns of the slaughter of the suitors from Eurykleia, who urges her to come and see with her own eyes (23.5ff.). (Penelope is skeptical of such a message [23.21–4].) Eurykleia herself did not see it but only overheard the outcry (23.40–2). Penelope ultimately requires the testimony of her own eyes (23.81–4). And yet, her sense of sight is insufficient to recognize Odysseus (23.93–5). She knows that she will have to recognize him through σήματα 'signs' (23.107–10).

Penelope is, above all, the message-receiver. Odysseus claims that he wants to take a message to Penelope (15.313–14) and wants no one, not even Penelope, to hear that he is in the palace (16.301–3). Athena disguises Odysseus lest the swineherd recognize him and take a message to Penelope (16.457–9). Penelope asks Telemachos for news of Odysseus (17.104–6). She wants to ask the stranger for news of Odysseus (17.509–11). Penelope's last mention in the poem sums up her characterization as the recipient of aural messages. When Dolios welcomes Odysseus, he asks if Penelope knows of Odysseus' return or if they should send her a messenger (24.403–5). Certainly all of this may simply reflect the secluded role of the wife in archaic society, but the poet nevertheless takes pains to emphasize Penelope's perception of events through her sense of hearing.

One effect of Penelope's repeated reception of verbal messages may be the implication that she has a heightened sensitivity to non-verbal sounds as well. Certainly, she successfully interprets Telemachos' sneeze as a favorable omen (17.542–7), but it remains an open question whether or not she understands the creaking of the storeroom doors as we are able to, given the benefit of the simile and its implications.

Appreciating the ominous significance of the doors that creak like the bellow of a bull, we may be less perplexed by the tears that Penelope sheds just after taking down the bow (21.56). She may weep not just because the bow reminds her of Odysseus and because the results of the contest are uncertain,[26] but also, possibly, at the harshness of the punishment that the omen augurs for the suitors. One may recall the tears that she shed in her dream for the geese slaughtered by the eagle (19.541). Odysseus explicitly identified the geese and the eagle in the dream as representing respectively the suitors and himself (19.547–50). But, in any case, Penelope's characterization as an attentive listener may provide a model for the hearer or reader of the poem encountering the aural analogy in *Odyssey* 21.

Close attention to the terms used in the analogy and their function in other contexts

[26] A. Amory notes that the tears are otherwise unexplained and that at other times when Penelope weeps, reasons are given in the text. Amory suggests that seeing the bow reminds Penelope of Odysseus, and that she feels the strain of nervous tension because she is starting a course of action that is irrevocable and its outcome uncertain ('The Reunion of Odysseus and Penelope', in C. H. Taylor [ed.], *Essays on the Odyssey* [Bloomington, 1963], pp. 113–14). N. Felson-Rubin, who provides useful bibliography on the question, similarly concludes that Penelope weeps because the weapon reminds her of Odysseus and also 'at the implications of her decision to wait no longer' ('Penelope's Perspective: Character from Plot in Homer', in J. M. Bremer *et al.* [eds], *Homer: Beyond Oral Poetry* [Amsterdam, 1987], p. 65 and n. 22).

suggests that the image of a bull bellowing while grazing in a meadow is not simply decoration for the sound of heavy doors opening. The imagery is not chosen at random. The ominous terms in both tenor and vehicle are associated with death in general and sacrifice in particular. Functioning at once thematically and narratologically, the simile subtly evokes and even substitutes for the sacrifice that Odysseus will make to Poseidon after the conclusion of the poem. At the same time, the simile also delicately foreshadows the death of the suitors and may even substitute for the sacrifice that Odysseus does not make before the slaughter begins.

The analogy at 21.48–50 derives dramatic relevance, therefore, from its participation in two distinct but intertwined themes in the poem: Odysseus' offense against Polyphemos (and thereby Poseidon) and resultant suffering, and the suitors' violation of the hospitality of Odysseus' household until Odysseus enacts vengeance. Drawing upon these two of the *Odyssey*'s numerous stories of violations of social order and repayment, the image of the bellowing, grazing bull evokes simultaneously both imminent violence and vengeance and the restoration of balance and order. It reveals a way in which the one process may be integrated into the other.

The coincidence of both themes in one brief image correlates with the poem's somewhat jarring juxtaposition of Odysseus' safe homecoming with his vicious act of violent slaughter.[27] The participation of both themes in a single image helps to portray the suitors' deaths as essential to the restoration of social harmony, just as the ritual sacrifice of animals is understood by archaic society as a bloody, but necessary, feature of human survival, happiness, and prosperity. The severity of the suitors' punishment, like the severity of sacrifice, is seen to be equally essential to the maintenance of social order.

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[27] H. Levy discusses the harsh slaughter of suitors and its incongruity with the tone of the rest of the poem. He posits the existence of an ancient Greek folktale about the guest's obligation not to abuse the host's generosity ('The Odyssean Suitors and the Host–Guest relationship', *TAPA* 94 [1963], 147–53).