

## The Unexpected Evolution of the Fearful Lion's Image

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Ever since its most archaic phases, the Roman culture was characterised by a constant osmosis with the Greek literature. This kind of relationship generated an artistic and literary production mostly based on the imitations of the traditional Greek genres and contents. This paper, in particular, aims to examine the lion's portrayal through the development of the Lion Simile in Latin poetry, by also considering the great influence exerted by the Hellenistic epigrams.

The war episodes described by Homer's lines contribute to relate the feral and bloody violence of the lion-hero with values like courage and fortitude.<sup>2</sup> At this regard, it is useful to remember the four powerful similitudes connected to the image of King Agamemnon within Iliad's 11th book. In these contexts, the poet compares the warrior's fury during the battle to the one of a lion in a dreadful succession of fights.<sup>3</sup>

Firstly, the beast tears the fast deer's νήπια τέκνα ('new-born cubs') apart, ripping their tender hearts out of their chests, cf. Hom. *Il.* 11.113–119:

Ὦς δὲ λέων ἐλάφοιο ταχείης νήπια τέκνα  
 ῥηϊδίως συνέαξε λαβῶν ρατεροῖσιν ὄδοῦσιν  
 ἐλθῶν εἰς εὐνήν, ἀπαλόν τέ σφ' ἤτορ ἀπηύρα·  
 ἦ δ' εἴ πέρ τε τύχησι μάλα σχεδόν, οὐ δύναταί σφι  
 χραισμεῖν· αὐτὴν γάρ μιν ὑπὸ τρόμος αἰνὸς ἰκάνει·  
 καρπαλίμως δ' ἦϊξε διὰ δρυμὰ πυκνὰ καὶ ὕλην  
 σπεύδουσ' ἰδρώουσα κραταιοῦ θηρὸς ὑφ' ὀρμῆς.

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2 Cf. Hom. *Il.* 10.297, 13.198, but also Tyr. fr. 11 G.-P., Aesch. *Ag.* 727, 827–828, 1224, 1258, Pl. *Rep.* 588d, 589b, 590a, 620b, Phld. *Ira* 27.19–20, Antip. Sid. *AP* 7.426.6 (= *HE* 395), Lucr. 3.296, 3.741–742, Sen. *Dial.* 4.16.1, Stat. *Silv.* 2.5.1, and Clem. Alex. *Prtr.* 1.4.1. On the aggressive representation of the lion's image, cf. Di Benedetto (1987), 278, and Lonsdale (1990), 56–60. A general analysis about the Homeric Lion Simile is contained in Schnapp-Gourbeillon (1981).

3 Similar comparisons can be recognised in: Aesch. *Ch.* 939, *Eu.* 193, Soph. *Ph.* 1436, Eur. *Or.* 1400–1402, *El.* 1162, Call. *Cer.* 50, Theocr. 26. 21, Nonn. *D.* 3.388, 48.788, 48.918, and Q. S. 1.315, 3.202, 12.530–533.

“And as a lion easily crushes the little ones of a swift hind, when he sized them with his mighty teeth, and has come to their lair and takes from them their tender life; and the mother, though she happens to be very near, cannot protect them, for on herself too comes dread trembling, and swiftly she darts through the thick brush and the woods sweating in her haste before the mighty beast’s attack.”<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, it fiercely leaps on its preys, forcing them to plead for their life; cf. Hom. *Il.* 11.129–130: ὁ δ’ ἐναντίον ὤρτο λέων ὡς/ Ἀτρεΐδης· τῷ δ’ αὖτ’ ἐκ δίφρου γουναζέσθην, “but he rushed against them like a lion,/ the son of Atreus, and the two begged him from the chariot”.<sup>5</sup>

Then, it chases the helpless cows, grabbing them with its strong teeth and devouring their bloody entrails, cf. Hom. *Il.* 11.172–176:

Οἱ δ’ ἔτι κὰμ μέσσον πεδίον φοβέοντο βόες ὡς,  
 ἅς τε λέων ἐφόβησε μολῶν ἐν νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ  
 πάσας· τῇ δέ τ’ ἰῆ ἀναφαίνεται αἰπὺς ὄλεθρος·  
 τῆς δ’ ἐξ ἀχέν’ ἔαξε λαβῶν κρατεροῖσιν ὄδοῦσι  
 πρῶτον, ἔπειτα δέ θ’ αἶμα καὶ ἔγκατα πάντα λαφύσει.

“But some were still driven in rout over the middle of the plain like cattle that a lion has driven in rout, coming on them in the dead of night; all he has routed, but to one appears sheer destruction; her neck seizes first in his mighty teeth and breaks it, and then he devours the blood and all the inward parts.”<sup>6</sup>

And eventually it catches its victims with an extraordinary fury; cf. Hom. *Il.* 11.238–240:

Καὶ τό γε χειρὶ λαβῶν εὐρὺ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων  
 ἔλκ’ ἐπὶ οἷ μεμαῶς ὡς τε λίσ, ἐκ δ’ ἄρα χειρὸς  
 σπάσσατο· τὸν δ’ ἄορι πλῆξ’ ἀχένα, λῦσε δέ γυῖα.

“Then wide-ruling Agamemnon seized the spear in his hand and drew it toward him furiously like a lion and pulled it from the hand of Iphidamas, and struck him on the neck with his sword and loosed his limbs.”<sup>7</sup>

4 Transl. Murray (1999).

5 Transl. Murray (1999).

6 Transl. Murray (1999).

7 Transl. Murray (1999).

However, throughout the history of Greek and Latin literatures, the lion's portrayal has been subjected to a gradual but irrepressible evolutionary process. In fact, a group of Hellenistic epigrams, included within the 6th book of the Greek Anthology, contains a peculiar description of the wild beast: cf. [Simon.] AP 6.217 = HE 3304–3313, Leon. AP 6.221 = HE 2291–2300, Diosc. AP 6.220 = HE 1539–1554, Alc. Mess. AP 6.218 = HE 134–143, Antip. Sid. AP 6.219 = HE 608–631, and Antist. AP 6.237 = GP 1101–1108.<sup>8</sup> All of them refer to the Phrygian myth pertaining to the Great Mother Cybele,<sup>9</sup> and depict the image of a fearful lion, surprisingly able to stop the hunt or to flee away after being frightened. Among the aforementioned epigrams, the one by Dioscorides<sup>10</sup> (a poet living in the second half of the 3rd c. BCE) displays a better and more complete storytelling, specifying the site of the adventure (the path between Pessinus and Sardis) as well as the name of its hero (the minister Atys).<sup>11</sup> It has been defined as a 'vera e propria elegia',<sup>12</sup> characterised by a clear aetiological nature also able to influence several later compositions. The poet, indeed, reports the original story about the consecration of the drum to the Great Mother. Apparently, she receives it as a sort of ex-voto by her minister Atys, who wishes to thank her for escaping the brutal attack of a lion, while traveling from Pessinus to Sardis:

Σάρδις Πεσσινόνεντος ἀπὸ Φρυγὸς ἦθελ' ἰκέσθαι  
 ἔκφρων, μαινομένην δοὺς ἀνέμοισι τρίχα,  
 ἀγνὸς Ἄτυς, Κυβέλης θαλαμηπόλος· ἄγρια δ' αὐτοῦ  
 ἐψύχθη χαλεπῆς πνεύματα θευφορίας,

ἐσπέριον στείχοντος ἀνὰ κνέφας· εἰς δὲ κάταντες  
 ἄντρον ἔδου, νεύσας βαιὸν ἄπωθεν ὁδοῦ.  
 Τοῦ δὲ λέων ὤρουσε κατὰ στίβον, ἀνδράσι δεῖμα  
 θαρσαλέοις, Γάλλῳ δ' οὐδ' ὀνομαστὸν ἄχος,  
 ὃς τότε ἄναυδος ἔμεινε δέους ὑπο, καί τινος αὐρῆ

δαίμονος ἐς στονοῦν τύμπανον ἦκε χέρας·  
 οὗ βαρὺ μικήσαντος, ὁ θαρσαλεώτερος ἄλλων  
 τετραπόδων, ἐλάφων ἔδραμεν ὀξύτερον,

8 Cf. De Gregori (1909), 164, and De Stefani (1996), 200–203.

9 Within the Latin literature, this same myth is described in Cat. 63. On this topic, cf. Mulroy (1976), 61–72, Fedeli (1981), 256, and Courtney (1985), 85–100.

10 Cf. Galán Vioque (2001), 220–233.

11 Cf. Gow-Page (1965), 2.246.

12 Di Castri (1996), 53.

τὸν βαρὺν οὐ μείνας ἀκοῆς ψόφον, ἐκ δ' βόησεν·  
 'μῆτερ, Σαγγαρίου χεῖλεσι πὰρ ποταμοῦ

ἱρὴν σοὶ θαλάμην, ζῳάγρια, καὶ λαλάγημα  
 τοῦτο, τὸ θηρὶ φυγῆς αἴτιον, ἀντίθεμαι'.

“Chaste Atys, the gelded servant of Cybele, in frenzy giving his wild hair to the wind, wished to reach Sardis from Phrygian Pessinus; but when the dark of evening fell upon him in his course, the fierce fervour of his bitter ecstasy was cooled and he took shelter in a descending cavern, turning aside a little from the road. But a lion came swiftly on his track, a terror to brave men and to him an inexpressible woe. He stood speechless from fear and by some divine inspiration put his hand to his sounding tambour. At its deep roar, the most courageous of beasts ran off quicker than a deer, unable to bear the deep note in its ears, and he cried out: ‘Great Mother, by the banks of the Sangarias I dedicate to thee, in thanks for my life, my holy thalame and this noisy instrument that caused the lion to fly’.<sup>13</sup>

In particular, in ll. 7–13, the poet describes the dangerous encounter between the minister and the lion. Since this latter is a sacred animal connected to the goddess Cybele, it is significant that it appears exactly when Atys’ divine ecstasy seems to be less intense<sup>14</sup> (cf. ll. 3–5). Thanks to this sudden attack, the Great Mother manages to bring the minister’s soul once again under her total control. This is the reason why Atys tries to make amend for his brief moment of weakness by consecrating to her the musical instrument that would have become typical of her rites, from that moment on. On the other hand, even though the lion was previously defined as δειμα (‘terror’, cf. l. 7), ἄχος (‘woe’, cf. l. 8) and ὁ θαρσαλέωτερος ἄλλων/ τετραπόδων (‘the most courageous of beasts’, cf. ll. 11–12), it not only cannot catch and kill its prey, but it even assumes that same vile attitude generally attributed to an animal like the deer. Therefore, if the νήπια τέκνα, described by ll. 11.113–119, could never escape the lion’s devastating fury, the line 12 of Dioscorides’ epigram places these two beasts on the same level and portrays the lion as a fearful creature, even more coward than the deer, by saying ἐλάφῳν ἔδραμεν ὀξύτερον (“it fled away faster than the deer”).

This is certainly a less aggressive depiction of the animal, which can also be found in some Lion Similes belonging to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Statius’ *Thebais*

13 Transl. Paton (1960–1968).

14 In this regard, Gow-Page (1965), 2.248 add: “it may be noted, though the coincidence is perhaps accidental, that in Catullus too the lion does not appear until Attis has lost his enthusiasm”.

and Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, where the lion uses its strength not only to bravely conquer the prey but, most of all, to defend its cubs out of fear of losing them. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for example, the lioness-Hecuba chases the tracks of her prey with the only purpose of avenging the unfair death of her cub.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, after seeing Polidorus' body, the Trojan queen goes to visit Polymestor, the one who was responsible for his death, and then, by a clever deception, she takes her revenge by ripping his bulbs out of his orbits, cf. 13.547–548:

Utque furit catulo lactente orbata leaena  
signaque nacta pedum sequitur, quem non videt, hostem.

“And as a lioness rages when her suckling cub has been stolen from her, and follows the tracks of her enemy, though she does not see him”.<sup>16</sup>

However, it is the Latin epic production, belonging to the 1st c. A.D., which shows us the complete development of the fearful lion, thanks to both the imitation of the Greek epic poetry and the influence of the Hellenistic epigrams like Dioscorides' one.

Statius' lines, in particular, overthrow the ancient Homeric code by introducing a different description of the epic hero. In *Thebais'* episodes there are several feminine figures who become protagonists of the events, being recognised as true heroines and performing the most daring and infamous acts with the same ferocity as the Hyrcanian lionesses. In 5.203–205, for instance, the poet speaks about a group of lionesses-women who plan a conspiracy against their own men, veterans of the battles against the Thracians, and assault them in the middle of the night:

Non aliter Scythicos armenta per agros  
Hyrcanae clausere leae, quas exigit ortu  
prima fames, audique implorant ubera nati.

“Not otherwise do Hyrcanian lionesses encircle herds in Scythian fields; early hunger drives them forth at dawn and their greedy cubs implore their udders”.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hardie (2015), 4.299, and Bömer (1982), 338.

<sup>16</sup> Transl. Miller (1916).

<sup>17</sup> Transl. Shackleton Bailey (2003).

In 12.356–358,<sup>18</sup> instead, he provides the reader with an enraged image of Antigone who, as furious as a lioness, secretly rushes out of Thebes' walls in order to reach the place where her brother Polynices was laying without a proper burial: ...<sup>19</sup>

Fremitu quo territat agros  
virginis ira leae, rabies cui libera tandem  
et primus sine matre furor....

“With a cry like the angry roar of a virgin lioness, striking terror into the countryside, her rage free at last and her fury for the first time without her dam”.<sup>20</sup>

It is evident that, along with an original representation of the heroic code, Statius' literary parallels present a fine review of the Lion Simile. The *Thebais'* lionesses, indeed, do not express their anger or their strength during a brave act of war, but purely in familiar contexts, and only to obtain food for their cubs or to reach the body of a lost brother. Hence, the hunts conducted by Statius' lionesses cannot be compared to the selfish fights and attacks perpetrated by the Homeric lions. Their actions are generated by rather common feelings like fear and pain, and not by the ancient ideas of honour and courage: Statius' lionesses only wish is to protect their families. Therefore, as in Dioscorides' epigram, where the beast flees away frightened by the sound of Atys' drum, it is the survival instinct, and not the heroic spirit, that guides the new lions' actions.

The context described by Stat. *Theb.* 414–419 is also interesting. It displays a sort of devaluation of the warrior's role, since the hero is now compared to a lioness and not to a lion. Within the previously mentioned literary parallels, Statius relates the image of the lioness only to women, underlining both their strength and their audacity; while, in this case, he overthrows the Lion Simile by making a comparison between Dymas and a lioness, since he was considered as a woman only wishing to protect her progeny.

Ut lea, quam saevo fetam pressere cubili  
venantes Numidae, natos erecta superstat,  
mente sub incerta torvum ac miserabile frendens;  
illa quidem turbare globos et frangere morsu  
tela queat, sed prolis amor crudelia vincit  
pectora, et a media catulos circumspicit ira.

18 Cf. Hoffmann (1999), 44–49.

19 Within the *Thebais'* 12th book, Statius introduces a new representation of the feminine image: Antigone and Argia can easily be considered as epic heroines. According to Statius' point of view, the woman is the only one capable of fighting against a corrupted world, full of impiety and misfortune: cf. Bessone (2011), 200–223.

20 Transl. Shackleton Bailey (2003).

“So a lioness that has newly whelped, beset by Numidian hunters in her cruel den, stands upright over her young, gnashing her teeth in grim and piteous wise, her mind in doubt; she could disrupt the groups and break their weapons with her bite, but love for her offspring binds her cruel heart and from the midst of her fury she looks round at her cubs”.<sup>21</sup>

The actual difference between Statius' verses and Homer's ones is not the desire of defending someone other than themselves, as it occurs in some Iliadic sections (cf. *infra*), but the sense of fear which takes possession of the hero's mind and then forces him to refuse the battle and to plead not only for his life, but also for his beloved one's salvation. This is an unusual lion's depiction, similar to the one analysed in Dioscorides' epigram. Both the contexts are characterised by common narrative elements, like the dark beast's howl (cf. l. 416: *torvum ac miserabile frendens*), which reminds of the deep rumbling sound of Atys' drum (cf. Diosc. AP 6.220.11–13 = HE 1549–1551), and the reference to the grim cave where the action took place (cf. l. 414: *cubili*), that resembles the mountainous cave on the route between Pessinus and Sardis (cf. Diosc. AP 6.220.5–6 = HE 1543–1544). The only substantial difference can be found in the fact that, if in Dioscorides' epigram the lion tries to hunt the prey before fleeing away, in Statius' lines the lioness is the one hunted by someone else.

In 9.737–740, Valerius Flaccus applies the feminine version of the Lion Simile to some narrative elements based on *Il.* 17.132–137.<sup>22</sup> The lioness-Heracles portrayed by the *Argonautica's* verses is desperately searching for her beloved Ilas and refuses to leave the woods and to re-join her companions: on the contrary, she produces endless dark roars, obstructs the paths, and stands guard all night long:

Non aliter gemitum quondam lea prolis ademptae  
torva dedit: sedet inde viis inclusaque longo  
pervigilant castella metu; dolor attrahit orbes  
interea et misero manat iuba sordida luctu.

“Not otherwise upon a time hath a lioness groaned in anguish for her lost cub; then doth she beset the roadways, and the barricaded strongholds

21 Transl. Shackleton Bailey (2003).

22 Cf. Hom. *Il.* 18.316–322, which describes Achilles' desperation for Patroclus' death. In this regard, Hershkowitz (1998), 154–155 affirms that even though both Heracles and Achilles considered themselves responsible of their beloved ones' death, the Homeric similitude underlines the lion-Achilles' furious roar, while the main focus of Valerius Flaccus' comparison is certainly the pain. On the same topic, cf. also Soubiran (2002), 243–244.

keep long and anxious vigil; meanwhile her eyes are drawn with grief, and her mane droops low in unkept misery and distress".<sup>23</sup>

The most evident reference to the *Iliad* is the description of the hero's eyes withdrawing into the furrowed brow (cf. *I.* 739: *dolor attrahit orbis*) which resembles *Il.* 17.136, where the main protagonist is the lion-Ajax (πᾶν δὲ τ' ἐπισκύνιον κάτω ἔλκεται ὅσσε καλύπτων, "and (he) draws down his entire brow to cover his eyes")<sup>24</sup>. However, the foremost difference between these two literary parallels is identified in the reasons why these beasts corrugate their eyes and their forehead: in Heracles' case the main cause is the *dolor*, a very deep reaction which is appropriate to the erotic-familiar context described by Valerius Flaccus;<sup>25</sup> while in Ajax's circumstances the principal reason is the so-called σθένος that represents the typical 'virile strength' pertaining to the Homeric war contexts.

Therefore, both Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' Lion Similes not only create a more humanised lion's portrayal, as it often occurs in some literary passages from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but they also underline the absolute lion's inability to conduct a proper hunt, as Dioscorides and the other Hellenistic poets describe in their epigrams.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, while in AP 6.220 = HE 1539–1554 the beast does not achieve its purpose because it is suddenly frightened, Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' lionesses are never able to kill their preys either because of fear, or because they often use their bloodhound intuition to rescue/avenge their lost cubs.

The outcome of this surprising development is the possibility to analyse the lion's figure through an unusual perspective, the moralistic one, which is utterly opposite to the traditional bloodthirsty depiction of the lion guided by the need of glory. Moreover, as previously anticipated, the evolution of the Lion Simile is already evident within the Homeric poems and, in particular, in the last sections of the *Iliad*<sup>27</sup> as well as in five literary parallels from the *Odyssey*.

A first element of novelty appears in *Il.* 17.132–137. This context enhances an image of the lion interested in defending its pride, whereas its usual aggressive behaviour towards every living creature becomes completely marginal.<sup>28</sup> Ajax,

23 Transl. Mozley (1936).

24 Transl. Murray (1999).

25 Cf. Spaltenstein (2004), 203: "Val. montre un deuil presque humain".

26 Hershkowitz (1998), 155, describing Valerius Flaccus' lioness, affirms that she seems characterised by a certain "lack of ferocity", which is opposite to the "fierce anger" showed by the Homeric lions in every context, including the mournful ones.

27 Cf. Di Benedetto (1994), 151.

28 Cf. Di Benedetto (1994), 151.

indeed, inspired by Apollo's will, intervenes with his shield to protect Patroclus' body from Hector's outrage, facing his enemy like a lion ready to defend its cubs from the hunters' attacks:

Αἴας δ' ἀμφὶ Μενoitιάδη σάκος εὐρὺ καλύψας  
 ἐστήκει ὡς τίς τε λέων περι οἷσι τέκεσσιν,  
 ὧ ῥά τε νήπι' ἄγοντι συναντήσωνται ἐν ὕλῃ  
 ἄνδρες ἐπακτῆρες· ὁ δέ τε σθένει βλεμεαίνει,  
 πᾶν δέ τ' ἐπισκύνιον κάτω ἔλκεται ὅσσε καλύπτων·  
 ὡς Αἴας περι Πατρόκλῳ ἥρωϊ βεβήκει.

"But Aias covered the son of Menoetius round about with his broad shield, and stood like a lion over his whelps, one that huntsmen have encountered in the forest as he leads his young; and he exults in his might, and draws down his entire brow to cover his eyes; so did Aias stand over the warrior Patroclus."<sup>29</sup>

In this regard, Di Benedetto adds that, while in // 9.113–119 the lion-Agamemnon destroyed the deer's νήπια τέκνα without mercy, now it tries to protect its own ones from the threats posed by the hunters.<sup>30</sup> It is an extraordinary exemplum of courage, not resulting from a personal need for glory, but from the noblest sentiment of paternal love, which pushes the lion-Aias to find the strength to protect himself and someone else. However, in contrast with what happens in Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' episodes, the heroic code which Aias responds to is consistent with the archaic tradition and is not yet characterised by any kind of stylistic reversal. In addition, unlike Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' characters, the Iliadic hero would never have refused the battle against his enemy.

The natural evolution of this similitude is contained in // 18.316–322, referring to Achilles' cry over Patroclus' corpse:

Τοῖσι δὲ Πηλεΐδης ἀδινού ἔξηρχε γόοιο  
 χεῖρας ἐπ' ἀνδροφόνους θέμενος στήθεσσιν εταίρου  
 πυκνὰ μάλα στενάχων ὡς τε λῖς ἠϋγένειος,  
 ὧ ῥά θ' ὑπὸ σκύνους ἐλαφιβόλος ἀρπάσῃ ἀνήρ  
 ὕλης ἐκ πυκινῆς· ὁ δέ τ' ἄχνυται ὕστερος ἐλθῶν,  
 πολλὰ δέ τ' ἄγκε' ἐπῆλθε μετ' ἀνέρος ἴχνι' ἐρευνῶν  
 εἶ ποθεν ἐξεύροι· μάλα γὰρ δριμύς χόλος αἰρεῖ.

29 Transl. Murray (1999).

30 Cf. Di Benedetto (1994), 151–152.

“And among them the son of Peleus was leader in the vehement lamentation, laying his man-slaying hands on the breast of his comrade and uttering many a groan, like a bearded lion whose whelps some hunter of stags has snatched away out of the thick wood; and the lion coming back later grieves, and through many a glen he ranges on the track of the footsteps of the man in the hope that he may find him somewhere; for anger exceeding bitter lays hold of him.”<sup>31</sup>

It is clear that, while in the previous similitude the cubs seemed only to be in serious danger, they have now definitely disappeared. The lion, instead, gripped by anger and anguish, can do nothing but try to track the hunter who stole them.<sup>32</sup> In this same way, the warrior swears to avenge Patroclus and not to rest until he has obtained both Hector’s head and arms. Actually, although he is no longer driven by the selfish desire for eternal glory, but by the desire of honouring a beloved one, the hero knows very well how to fight in order to accomplish his purpose.

The last Achilles’ Lion Similes appear in *Il.* 20.164–175 and in *Il.* 24.572–573. In the first case, the lion-Achilles prepares to attack only after a provocation:<sup>33</sup>

Πηλεΐδης δ’ ἐτέρωθεν ἐναντίον ὄρτο λέων ὡς  
 σίντης, ὃν τε καὶ ἄνδρες ἀποκτάμενοι μεμάασιν  
 ἀγρόμενοι πᾶς δῆμος· ὃ δὲ πρῶτον μὲν ἀτίζων  
 ἔρχεται, ἀλλ’ ὅτε κέν τις ἀρηιθίων αἰζηῶν  
 δουρὶ βάλη ἑάλῃ τε χανῶν, περὶ τ’ ἀφρὸς ὀδόντας  
 γίννεται, ἐν δὲ τέ οἱ κραδίη στένει ἄλκιμον ἦτορ,  
 οὐρῆ δὲ πλευράς τε καὶ ἰσχία ἀμφοτέρωθεν  
 μαστίεται, ἐὲ δ’ αὐτὸν ἐποτρύνει μαχέσασθαι,  
 γλαυκίων δ’ ἰθὺς φέρεται μένει, ἦν τινα πέφνη  
 ἀνδρῶν, ἢ αὐτὸς φθίεται πρώτῳ ἐν ὀμίλῳ·  
 ὡς Ἀχιλλῆϊ ὄτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμὸς ἀγῆνωρ  
 ἀντίον ἐλθέμεναι μεγαλήτορος Αἰνείαιο.

“And on the other side the son of Peleus rushed against him like a lion a revenging lion that men are eager to slay a whole people that has

31 Transl. Murray (1999).

32 In this regard, the presence of ἐλαφηβόλος (‘deer hunter’) is significant, since it creates a parallel between the lion’s fate and the deer’s one described by *Il.* 11.113–119: cf. Di Benedetto (1994), 153.

33 On the contrary, Nagy does not take into consideration the impulse resulting from the provocation. Moreover, he does not dedicate a proper analysis to Achilles’ development, through the use of the Lion Simile in the last *Iliad*’s sections: cf. Nagy (1981), 136–137/320, and also Di Benedetto (1994), 154.

gathered together; and he at first caring nothing of them goes his way, but when one of the youths swift in battle has struck him with a spear-cast, then he gathers himself with his mouth wide open and foam appears about his teeth, and his mighty spirit groans within, and with his tail he lash his ribs and his flanks on both sides and rouses himself to fight, and with glaring eyes he rushes straight on his fury, whether he slay some man or himself be slain in the foremost throng; so was Achilles driven by his fury and his gallant heart to go out to face great-hearted Aeneas.”<sup>34</sup>

In the second case, instead, caught by a deep feeling of humane pietas, he leaps out of his tent together with two θεράποντες,<sup>35</sup> with the intention of arranging for the cleansing of Hector's body, and then of accepting the ransom requested by his father Priam:<sup>36</sup>

Πηλεΐδης δ' οἴκοιο λέων ὡς ἄλτο θύραζε  
οὐκ οἶος, ἄμα τῷ γε δύο θεράποντες ἔποντο.

“But like a lion the son of Peleus sprang out of the house – not alone, for with him went two attendants as well.”<sup>37</sup>

Thus, albeit the hero retains his leonine nature, he denies Apollo's words, contained in *Il.* 24.40–45, where the god equates Achilles with the lion to highlight his inflexible and implacable attitude.<sup>38</sup>

The constant development of the Lion Simile takes also place in the *Odyssey's* lines,<sup>39</sup> where it can be found in five passages: 4.335–340 and 791–793, 6.130–136,

34 Transl. Murray (1999).

35 It is a variation of the form used in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in reference to female characters, such as Helen (cf. *Il.* 3.143), Penelope (cf. *Od.* 1.331, 18.207, and 19.601) or Nausicaa (cf. *Od.* 6.84). The peculiarity of *Il.* 24.572–573, however, consists in the fact that “non solo vengono menzionati i nomi dei due θεράποντες ma si spiega anche il rapporto con cui Achille era legato a loro” (Di Benedetto {1987}, 286).

36 Cf. Scott (1974), 61, and Macleod (1982), 137.

37 Transl. Murray (1999).

38 Furthermore, the pitiful leonine behaviour described by the last similitudes relating to Achilles acquires an even deeper meaning when compared to the bloody attitude portrayed by the last comparison linked to Hector, who rages on Patroclus' corpse like a hungry lion that cannot be kept away from the just killed prey: cf. Di Benedetto (1994), 155.

39 Cf. Curti (2003), 9–54.

9.292–293 and 22.401–406. Among them, as Fränkel<sup>40</sup> and then Mastromarco<sup>41</sup> point out, only the last portrays the act of a noble warrior, and depicts a lion-Odysseus covered in blood while leaving the field after devouring a bull:

Εὔρεν ἔπειτ' Ὀδυσῆα μετὰ κταμένοιισι νέκυσσιν,  
αἵματι καὶ λύθρῳ πεπαλαγμένον ὥστε λέοντα,  
ὅς ῥά τε βεβρωκῶς βοὸς ἔρχεται ἀγραύλοιο·  
πᾶν δ' ἄρα οἱ στήθός τε παρήϊά τ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν  
αιματόεντα πέλει, δεινὸς δ' εἰς ὧπα ιδέσθαι·  
ὡς Ὀδυσσεὺς πεπάλακτο πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὑπερθευ.

“There she found Odysseus and the bodies of the slain, all befouled with blood and filth, like a lion that comes from feeding on an ox of the farmstead, and all his breast and cheeks on either side are strained with blood, he is terrible to look upon; even so was Odysseus befouled, his feet and his hands above”.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, the remaining four literary parallels outline an image of the hero which is very different from that portrayed by Iliad’s 11th book. In *Od.* 4.335–340, for example, even without any explicit erotic connotation, the similitude appears in a context that could be defined as such. According to Menelaus’ words, the lion-Odysseus should have inflicted a horrible death to his wife’s suitors (compared to the νεβροί, ‘fawns’), in order to push them out of his nuptial bed:

Ἦς δ' ὀπότην ἐν ξυλόχῳ ἔλαφος κρατεροῖο λέοντος  
νεβροὺς κοιμήσασα νεηγενέας γαλαθηνοὺς  
κνημοὺς ἐξερέησι καὶ ἄγκεα ποιήεντα  
βοσκομένη, ὃ δ' ἔπειτα ἐὴν εἰσήλυθεν εὐνήν,  
ἀμφοτέροισι δὲ τοῖσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφῆκεν,  
ὡς Ὀδυσσεὺς κείνοισιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσει.

“Just as when in the thicket lair of a powerful lion a doe has laid to sleep her new-born suckling fawns, and roams over the mountain slopes and grassy vales seeking pasture, and then the lion comes to his lair and upon her two fawns lets loose a cruel doom, so will Odysseus let loose a cruel doom upon these men.”<sup>43</sup>

40 Cf. Fränkel (1921), 66–67.

41 Cf. Mastromarco (2003), 108.

42 Transl. Murray (1995).

43 Transl. Murray (1995).

In *Od.* 4.791–793, instead, Penelope is the one who is gripped by the same doubts of a lion surrounded and terrified by a crowd of men:

“Όσσα δὲ μερμήριξε λέων ἀνδρῶν ἐν ὀμίλῳ  
 δείσας, ὀππότε μιν δόλιον περὶ κύκλον ἄγωσι,  
 τόσσα μιν ὀρμαίνουσιν ἐπήλυθε νήδυμος ὕπνος.”

“And just as a lion is seized with fear and broods among a throng of men, when they draw their crafty ring about him, so was she pondering when sweet sleep came upon her.”<sup>44</sup>

In *Od.* 9.292–293, the comparison is expressed in reference to Polyphemus, who tears the limbs of Odysseus’ companions apart with the same ferocity as a mountain lion:

“Ἦσθι δ’ ὡς τε λέων ὄρεσίτροφος, οὐδ’ ἀπέλειπεν  
 ἔγκατά τε σάρκας τε καὶ ὀστέα μυελόντα.”

“And [Polyphemus] ate them like a mountain-natured lion, leaving nothing, ate the entrails, and the flesh, and the bones and marrow.”<sup>45</sup>

The Lion Simile used by Homer in *Od.* 6.130–136, while describing the encounter between Odysseus and Nausicaa, is also appealing:

Βῆ δ’ ἴμεν ὡς τε λέων ὄρεσίτροφος ἀλκί πεποιθώς,  
 ὅς τ’ εἶσ’ ὑόμενος καὶ ἀήμενος, ἐν δέ οἱ ὄσσε  
 δαίεται· αὐτὰρ ὁ βουσί μετέρχεται ἢ οἴεσιν  
 ἢ μετ’ ἀγροτέρας ἐλάφους· κέλεται δέ ἐ γαστήρ  
 μήλων πειρήσοντα καὶ ἐς πυκινὸν δόμον ἐλθεῖν·  
 ὡς Ὀδυσσεὺς κούρησιν εὐπλοκάμοισιν ἔμελλε  
 μίξεσθαι, γυμνός περ ἐών· χρεῖώ γὰρ ἴκανε.”

“Forth he came like a mountain-natured lion trusting in his strength, who goes forth beaten with rain and wind, his two eyes blazing in his head; into the midst of the cattle he goes, or of the sheep, or on the track of the wild deer; and his belly bids him go even into the close-built fold, to make an attack upon the flocks. Even so Odysseus was about to enter

44 Transl. Murray (1995).

45 Transl. Murray (1995).

the company of the fair-tressed maidens, naked though he was, for need had come upon him."<sup>46</sup>

Based on the presence of some lexical and semantic clues, such as the verb *μίξασθαι*, already attested in Homer with the meaning of 'having sexual relationships',<sup>47</sup> or the reference to the lion's 'burning eyes' (cf. Il. 131–132: οἱ ὄσσε/ δαίεται) and the reason of its appetite (interpreted as a sexual appetite) (cf. l. 133: κέλεται... γαστήρ), Glenn<sup>48</sup> believes that it can be considered as an ironic juxtaposition of both military and erotic vocabularies. However, as Mastromarco<sup>49</sup> remembers, these elements take an erotic connotation only after the Homeric period. In addition, every single reference to the burning eyes occurring in the *Iliad's* and the *Odyssey's* verses preserves the military value of the heroic ardour. However, although with no erotic connotation, the just analysed Lion Simile is inserted within a story-telling characterised by different images alluding to the sexual sphere. Examples of them are: (i) the reference to the approaching wedding of Nausicaa and the loss of her virginity, (ii) the motif of the girls playing alone on the bank of a river, exposing themselves to dangerous situations like the one of the traditional kidnapping for sexual purposes. Thus, based on this evidence, Mastromarco<sup>50</sup> assumes that the Lion Simile described in *Od.* 6.130–136 gave origin to the image of the predator assaulting the fawn-maid.

As a result, it is clear that in both Statius' and Valerius Flaccus' literary parallels the ancient heroic code endures an unrelenting reversal process which eventually reaches a complete devaluation of the warrior's role. At the same time, there is a decline of the traditional blood-thirsty image of the lion. Indeed, instead of fighting for its personal need for glory, the beast begins to be afraid, to fear for its cubs, and to behave cowardly, starting to refuse the fight and to listen only to its own survival instinct. In this regard, the influence of Hellenistic compositions, such as Dioscorides' AP 6. 220 = HE 1539–1554, is evident. These epigrams highlight the cowardice as a characterising element of the most ferocious creature existing and, although it is by no means certain that Statius and Valerius Flaccus had the actual opportunity to read Dioscorides' composition, it is still necessary to remember

46 Transl. Murray (1995).

47 On the erotic connotation of *μίξασθαι*, cf. Lonsdale (1990), 17, Albicker (1991), Garvie (1994), 117, and Glenn (1998), 111. However, in this case, it would be better "seguire i lessici omerici che registrano *μίξασθαι* di Odissea VI 136 tra i passi in cui il verbo indica l'azione di chi viene a contatto con un gruppo di persone, spesso con intenti bellici" (Mastromarco {2003}, 113). Since, as we all know, "the girls, to whom he appears like a lion, cannot be sure that his intentions are peaceful" (Garvie {1994}, 117).

48 Cf. Glenn (1998), 111–116.

49 Cf. Mastromarco (2003), 109.

50 Mastromarco (2003), 116.

how much this one influenced the following Greek and Latin authors. *AP* 6. 220 = *HE* 1539–1554 could be considered, for instance, the reference point for the imitation by Antipater of Sidon (cf. *AP* 6. 219 = *HE* 608–631) and Antistius (cf. *AP* 6. 237 = *GP* 1101–1108), who have re-proposed the same mythical tale, customising it with slight modifications, but always following the general contents described by their model.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the imitations belonging to the Latin period are very refined as well. Even though they display a different context, both their vocabulary and their structure are definitely inspired by Dioscorides' composition. Considerable affinities, for example, were found within the votive epigram placed at the end of the *Culex*, cf. ll. 413–414:

'Parve culex, pecudum custos tibi tale meranti  
funeris officium vitae pro munere reddit'.

"O tiny gnat, a shepherd pays you, who merit it, rite of burial, in return for the gift of life."<sup>52</sup>

These verses show, indeed, the same narrative structure portrayed by *AP* 6.220 = *HE* 1539–1554: facing an unexpected danger, the protagonist manages to save himself through a totally fortuitous expedient, and then decides to thank the gods through an offer.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the parallelism with some verses from Horace's *Carmen* 1.22 points out the same fact several times. Most precisely, it is necessary to underline the similarities with: l. 1 (*integer vitae scelerisque purus*, "the man of unblemished life who is unstained by crime")<sup>54</sup> which reminds us of Atys' chastity; ll. 10–11 (*ultra/ terminum*, "beyond my boundaries")<sup>55</sup> which refer to the voluntary departure of the protagonist from the main path; and l. 9 (*namque me silva lupus in Sabina*, "for in a Sabine wood [...] a wolf [...]")<sup>56</sup> which draws attention to both the elements of the dangerous territory and the ferocious beast. In this case, the wolf is also defined as *portentum* ("monster", cf. l. 13), as the lion was previously considered as a δειμα for brave men (cf. Diosc. *AP* 6.220.7 = *HE* 1545), and an unspeakable ἄχος for the travelling Gallic (cf. Diosc. *AP* 6.220.8 = *HE* 1546). It is also important to emphasize the correspondence between the

51 Cf. De Gregori (1901), 164.

52 Transl. Fairclough (1960).

53 In this regard, Hubaux (1939), 105, claims that "tout le poème (a) été composé pour amener l'épigramme finale". Cf. also lines 105–159 from the prologue belonging to the Orpheu litica.

54 Transl. Rudd (2004).

55 Transl. Rudd (2004).

56 Transl. Rudd (2004).

onomatopoeic *λαλάγημα*, “noisy instrument”<sup>57</sup> (cf. Diosc. AP 6.220.15 = HE 1553), and *Lalagen*, the name of the girl from the Horatian poem (cf. l. 10).<sup>58</sup>

Basing on these elements, it seems likely that, although probably only indirectly, Dioscorides and the other epigrammatists exerted a certain influence over Statius’ and Valerius Flaccus’ *Lion Similes*. Their example led to the creation of an opposite representation of the beast, which is well relatable to the downgrade of the heroes described by the Latin epic poetry.

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57 It is a dioscoridean hapax which gives birth to a brilliant metonymy hinting at Atys’ drum. The meaning of this word, indeed, identifies the act of chirping or chatting and, consequently, the ‘babble’: cf. LSJ, s.v. *λαλαγέω* and *λαλέω*. The latter, in particular, is witnessed in relation to musical instruments: cf. Theocr. 20.29 e Arist. Aud. 801a.29. On this topic, cf. Galán Vioque (2001), 233.

58 “L’*eufonico hapax alessandrino* [...] ha [...] fatalmente evocato al dotto poeta, già invaghito di precedenti ed utili spunti, il più che utile soprannome femminile, così ad hoc per la protagonista di turno, safficamente dulce loquentem” (Bonanno {1978}, 95). On the contrary, Prescott (1925), 277, previously affirmed: “it would be absurd to press the point of any immediate relation of the *Integer Vitae* to these epigrams [AP 6.217–221], and particularly to indulge in misdirected ingenuity by noting *λαλάγημα* of AP 6.220.15 in connection with the name of Horace’s heroine, or by observing minute likenesses between the description of the lions and Horace’s account of the wolf”. On the possible influence of Alcaeus 130b V., cf. Burzacchini (1976), 39–58.

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