
Epic Simile In Iliad

“Achilles now like inhuman fire raging on through the mountain... like a frenzied god of battle trampling all he killed... like oxen broad in the brow... so as great Achilles rampaged on”. The most basic comparison being made here is comparing Achilles rampaging to an inhuman fire raging on through the mountain. This describes Achilles at the peak of his revenge of the death of his beloved friend Patroclus. This is after he attempts to take on Hector. There are a few points of comparison: fire, a god, and oxen. Great warrior Achilles is compared to oxen broad in the brow and a frenzied god of battle in addition to a lengthy description of fire. This simile is most symbolically driven by the relationship between fire and rage; or Achilles’ *menis*. Both consume a person and last as long as there is fuel to keep going. Achilles’ rage is consuming him to relentlessly kill all the Trojans in sight, and this fiery rage causes him to continue almost blindly. Blind-sided rage is also a common characteristic among the gods— they tend to show no mercy unless they are reasoned with and talked down from their anger. Comparing Achilles’ rage to an oxen broad in the brow (a force of nature), is yet another example of blind-sided rage. In cartoons/media, oxen or bulls can be pictured with a raging anger in their eyes and they charge their victim relentlessly, just like Achilles approached the Trojans. Extra information in the simile that adds/enriches to the comparison is the earth “running black with blood” which gives the reader an image of the product of Achilles’ persistent rage. The description of the fire setting ablaze and swirling chaotically also depicts Achilles’ *menis*. Achilles’ lack of mercy when slaughtering all the Trojans adds tension because, quite frankly, it isn’t pretty— this all-consuming rage and it leads to his demise since he’s so focused on glory but isn’t willing to give his life up for it. The effects of this comparison is really to describe Achilles’ rampaging as a merciless force of nature, exemplifying his anger and prowess in battle. There is a bloodbath, literally, as Achilles goes hacking off Trojans’ heads. The fire comparison executes the idea of anger, vengeance, and retribution; as well as a graphic war scene accomplished by god-like Achilles.

Epic similes, by nature, are elaborate and decorative comparisons of unlike things— making the point of the story more vivid and easier to understand. The world from which this specific simile is drawn relates most to war. This inhuman anger Achilles is rampaging on to slaughter Trojans is during the war, and an encounter in battle like this wouldn’t occur without such a setting. Epic similes seem to occur most often in periods of high action and emotion— which also describes battle/war. This tells us perhaps that Homer and his audience enjoy drama. Or, aside from the drama, the extensive comparison between two unlike things could help the reader understand something they have never experienced or seen take place. For example, the audience reading Homer probably wouldn’t have had intense anger causing them to slaughter a bunch of people, but the comparison to a raging, merciless fire could help them understand why Achilles did what he did. The fuel to his fire was wanting to revenge the death of dear Patroclus, and this anger is unique because it stems from the love he had for his dear friend; he originally did not want to return to battle but he did after hearing the Trojans murdered his companion. The cumulative effect of the similes seems to be adding imagery and understanding to deep emotion. The *aristeia* of Achilles combines the many uses of epic simile (including imagery, understanding, and characterization) which are spread out among the scenes he is actually in. I think the most influential purpose of epic simile in the Iliad is to draw the reader away from the pain and suffering of the war setting and draw them into a little parallel world of pre or post-war peace—

hence the use of comparison to natural things as nature is generally seen as tranquil. In some instances, these epic similes are almost humorous, occurring at the climax of action or emotion; this redirects attention which is occasionally unexpected. When one is confronted with familiar emotions associated with whatever element of the simile, they are more likely to succumb to those feelings and set aside the topic in the story, which may make more difficult or gory parts of battle easier to read or process. Homer's use of epic simile could also potentially be guiding the reader into a way of thinking that he wants. For example, Homer likens Achilles' anger to something uncontrollable in the presence of fuel, but without the comparison the reader could inquire why Achilles didn't just control himself. Epic similes in the Iliad help to characterize, distract the reader, and provide familiar imagery.