

## Epic Echoes in Domestic Contexts: Homeric Battle Language in Hellenistic Poetry

Epic language courses through the poetry of the Hellenistic period. Just as Homer imbues battle scenes with highly stylized diction, the Hellenistic poets Theocritus, Callimachus, and Apollonius of Rhodes infuse their poetry with the same epic phrases, similes, and formulas. Yet, whereas Homer's language elevates martial valor, these later poets transpose his diction into markedly unheroic contexts: pastoral competitions, civic festivals, love laments, and scenes of domestic intimacy.

Although scholars have examined specific Homeric echoes in Hellenistic poetry, this paper proposes that the reuse of Homeric battle language in non-martial contexts warrants more systematic study. By exploring the transformation of formulaic death scenes, vividly comparative similes that juxtapose warriors with animals, storms, or fires, and other Homeric allusions, I argue that Hellenistic poets reframe epic language to serve new aesthetic and cultural purposes. By recontextualizing this language in non-martial, often quotidian settings, these poets manipulate the diction of war to dignify the ordinary, transforming the epic register into a vehicle for emotional depth, refined erudition, and poetic self-definition.

To demonstrate this shift, I analyze examples across Theocritus' *Idylls*, Callimachus' *Hymns*, and Apollonius' *Argonautica*. For instance, at *Idyll* 28.22, Theocritus transforms the martial epithet ἐκνήμιδες Ἀχαιοῖοι ("well-greaved Achaeans") into εὐαλάκατος Θεύγενις ("well-distaffed Theugenis"), recasting the heroic imagery of bronze-clad warriors into a domestic context where a woman's gift of a spinning tool replaces the warrior's arms (Hopkinson 2020). At *Hymn* 5.82, Callimachus writes παιδὸς δ' ὄμματα νύξ ἔλαβεν ("and night covered his eyes") to depict Teiresias being struck blind after seeing Athena bathing—an

unmistakable echo of the Homeric formula marking the moment a warrior dies, when night covers the eyes (e.g., *Il.*5.310) (Hopkinson 2020 ad loc). At *Argonautica* 3.761-5, Apollonius describes Medea’s torment over her love for Jason with language echoing Homeric battlefield trauma: the unending pain of love burns beneath her skin and strikes her κεφαλῆς ὑπὸ νείατον ἰνίον ἄχρις (“right under the bottom part of her skull”)—precisely where Telamonian Ajax delivers a mortal wound to Arkhelokos, κεφαλῆς τε καὶ ἀγένοϛ ἐν συνεοχμῶ, / νείατον ἀστράγαλον (“where the head springs from the neck at the top of the spine”) (*Il.*4.465-6) (Hopkinson 2020 ad loc). These allusions, often metrically and lexically precise, indicate a deep engagement with epic while recasting its themes within a Hellenistic aesthetic of refinement, learnedness, and emotional introspection.

While Homeric language ennobles heroic violence, its reappearance in Hellenistic poetry ennobles artistic labor, personal desire, and civic or domestic life. This study reveals general poetic strategies by which Hellenistic poets demilitarize Homeric phraseology, reanimating it to serve nonviolent, introspective, or mundane ends. In doing so, Hellenistic poets assert both continuity with and critical distance from their epic predecessor. Like epic warriors who fall and are covered by night, Homeric language itself undergoes a kind of death and rebirth—no longer bound to the battlefield but reanimated in the tender spaces of Hellenistic verse.

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