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"Milton's Similes"

T H E S I S .

for

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## Milton's Similes

"Simile" is a figure of speech in which two different things which have some accidental strong point or points of resemblance are compared. Both things must be mentioned and the comparison directly stated, usually by the use of such words as 'like,' 'so', 'as' etc. The verbal expression or embodiment of such a comparison is also considered a simile.

Writers of prose and poetry have made liberal use of this figure of speech, but it is in the field of epic poetry that the simile has had its greatest development. "Simile is essential to the epic,"<sup>1</sup> - not only the short, simple comparisons but also the longer, expanded simile. The works of the great classic epicists, Homer, Vergil, Ovid and Apollonius Rhodius, all offer excellent illustrations of the long, sustained simile. Through the influence of classic models simile found its way into English literature and we find Spenser, Milton and Arnold all employing this device effectively. Of all epic writers Milton recognized more than any other the possibilities of the simile.<sup>2</sup>

Without simile an epic, at its best, would be a colourless piece of work. The poet's problem is to give his narrative tone and landscape and to orient his characters in the imagination of his readers in terms of their experience.<sup>3</sup> Intangible things must be translated in terms of the tangible. Supernatural occurrences must be interpreted in mundane terms. Simile serves this purpose. By calling to mind things which men have done or endured, or natural and familiar experiences the poet gives to his story a sense of reality.<sup>3</sup> Therefore simile has become a part of the epic tradition

1. The Miltonic Simile - J. Whaler - Publications of Modern Language Association 46 : 1034

2. Ibid - p. 1070

3. Compounding and Distributing of Similes in Paradise Lost, J. Whaler Modern Philology 28:319

which has been handed down from epic writer to epic writer since the time of Homer.

The purpose of simile is fourfold.<sup>1</sup> In the first place it may be used for the sake of illustration, to make the reader see clearly a process, a thing, a human character, a place or an action.<sup>1</sup> It may define an abstract idea in terms of an analogous concrete thing. It may serve to suggest the poet's own attitude, either sympathetic or unsympathetic, towards the characters he is creating or the idea he is presenting. It may arouse in the reader emotions like those in the fable. Secondly, simile may be used to ennoble the subject, to add to its grandeur or sublimity.<sup>1</sup> In this case the poet, instead of choosing one of the homely images suitable for mere illustration, will seek an image more universal and less familiar - an image drawn from myth or legend, history or scientific knowledge. In the third place a simile may be introduced into the narrative for relief in the midst of a scene of strife or crisis.<sup>1</sup> It may add an element of suspense by suspending the action for a brief moment. The fourth function of simile is one known as prolepsis.<sup>1</sup> Here, an event which is to take place later in the fable is anticipated. A simile may perform more than one function. It may serve not only to illustrate but also to ennoble. It may not only ennoble but also bring relief in a period of stress. Whatever purpose a simile serves it must be pleasing, but no simile should ever be used just because it is pleasing.<sup>1</sup>

The poet who will use simile effectively must be well-balanced, of an analytical turn of mind and self-contained. It requires great skill to "pause in the midst of a narrative, to hold two things apart, paint the details of comparison and then return to the main subject"<sup>2</sup> and proceed with the story, without detracting from the interest. Too many similes will produce an effect similar

1. The Miltonic Simile - P. M. L. A. 46:1035 ff.

2. Gummere - A Handbook of Poetics p. 107

to the euphuistic style in prose. The story, itself, will be smothered and the reader lost in a maze of comparisons.

In studying Milton's use of simile four of his poems have been considered - "Comus," a mask; *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, both epic poems; and *Samson Agonistes*, a dramatic poem. The two epic poems furnish the greatest illustration of Milton's skill in the use of this artistic device.

Like every epic poet since the time of Homer, Milton had<sup>1</sup> as his inheritance and equipment certain images common to the epic. It was for him to fit these images, drawn from plant or animal life or certain natural phenomena, into his story. The Latin poet, Vergil, and the English poet, Spenser, had adapted Homer's prescribed images to their epics. Milton, however saw fit to leave the beaten track and his originality is shown, not only in his choice of images, but also in the patterns of his similes. He laid down for himself certain rules which he followed strictly. His similes are essentially his own.

Milton was a logician as well as a poet and his love of logic and completeness has influenced the nature of his similes. He insisted that there should be homology in all his similes, no matter how complex they might be - that is, that every detail<sup>2</sup> should have some application to the fable. He felt also that simile should not have too important a place in narrative. For this reason he did not allow a simile to be too long or to coincide with the end of a period.<sup>3</sup> He used plant and animal

1. Animal Simile in *Paradise Lost* - J. Whaler - P.M.L.A. 47:534

2. The Miltonic Simile - J. Whaler - P.M.L.A. 46:1034

3. Ibid - 1034

images very sparingly, feeling that they were too common and familiar for the lofty tone of his work. Milton is also distinguished from his predecessors by his arrangement of similes in groups or clusters and by his use of prolepsis.<sup>1</sup> The irregular distribution of the similes throughout his poems is a peculiarly Miltonic characteristic.<sup>2</sup>

Milton's similes offer great variety both in imagery and form, yet all can be reduced to a certain logical pattern. In an article on "The Miltonic Simile,"<sup>3</sup> Whaler defines four patterns into which similes fall, according to their simplicity or complexity. In presenting the formula for each pattern Whaler makes use of the following terms:

4.

"A" = the thing compared

S = the simile

r = the point of resemblance or relationship between these two terms

a, a', a", etc., s, s', s" etc. = details inferable from the immediate or general context.

S 'S' S" etc. = two or more similes grouped together under a single A.

? = the absence of homologous detail.

$A \underset{r}{\text{---}} S$  = A is like S in respect to r.

$A \underset{r}{>} S$ , or  $A \underset{r}{<} S$  = A surpasses or A is surpassed by S in respect to r."

5

The four patterns as defined by Whaler are:

1. The Miltonic Simile - J. Whaler - P.M.L.A. - 46:1034
2. Compounding & Distributing of Similes in Paradise Lost - Whaler - Mod. Philol. 28:323
3. The Miltonic Simile - J. Whaler, P.M.L.A. Vol. 46:1034-74
4. The Miltonic Simile - J. Whaler, P.M.L.A. Vol. 46:1037-38
5. Ibid. Pages 1038 ff.

"(1) Simple:"

Here the poet presents but two terms in which the points of resemblance are easily recognized. The formula for this would be: "A — S, with A  $\begin{smallmatrix} > \\ | \\ r \end{smallmatrix}$  S and A  $\begin{smallmatrix} < \\ | \\ r \end{smallmatrix}$  S as variants."

"(2) Complex Pattern with Perfect Homology:"

Here the statement of likeness (S) is carried further by details, "a, a', a" etc., but each of these details must have a corresponding detail in A, which will be represented as a, a', a", etc. In formula this pattern would be:

"A — S  
|  
r  
a — s  
|  
a' — s' etc."

"(3) Complex Pattern with a Logical Digression"

Occasionally, for the sake of art, the poet may admit an irrelevant detail in his complex simile. Such a detail may make the picture more interesting or may have much the same function as a "relief" simile. The formula would be:

"A — S  
|  
r  
a — s  
|  
a' — s'  
|  
? — s" "

"(4) Complex Pattern with four terms in Ratio."

Simile of this pattern is used where the poet has to express relative magnitudes or convey supernatural elements in tangible terms. The formula for this pattern is involved and may be expressed as:

$$A^1 > S^1 \underset{r}{=} A^2 > S^2, \text{ or if } A^2 \equiv S^1, \quad A^1 > S^1 \underset{r}{=} S^1 > S^2,$$

Like his predecessors Milton makes use of simile for the sake of illustration. The formation of Pandemonium is described in terms of a musical composition. Satan's entrance into Paradise is likened to a thief's entrance into a "rich burgher's house."<sup>2</sup> Both similes illustrate action. In P.L. 1.302 - 355, Milton makes use of a cluster of similes to illustrate the stages of an action.<sup>3</sup> The climactic arrangement of the terms is very effective. Satan's host, crushed, and helpless, lying on the burning lake, are compared to autumn leaves covering the ground. They begin to stir and their movement, in their helplessness is likened to that of sedge floating on the sea. Their motions become more noticeable, but, still broken, confused and helpless, they are compared to the "crushed Egyptian army". Then Satan charges them to awaken and at his ringing call they start up like pickets on duty who have been caught asleep. Milling about in disorderly array, they are compared to the plague of locusts called down upon Egypt by Moses. Finally the Hosts are assembled in a rude organization like that of the migrant northern Barbarians preparing to cross the Rhine and the Danube.

1. P. L. 1 708 - 709
2. P. L. iv 188 - 92.
3. Compounding & Distributing of Similes in Paradise Lost, Whaler, Mod. Philol. 28:314
4. Ibid. 28 - 314

P. R. 4.330 ff. superficial reading, without thought, reading which neglects the whole in favour of the choicer, more delightful passages, is compared to the "gathering of pebbles on the shore" by children.

The lofty theme of *Paradise Lost* calls for similes which will ennoble and emotionalize the narrative. In choosing unusual, less familiar images for this type of simile Milton had recourse to classic myth, encyclopaedic knowledge, folk-lore, history, geography and Biblical history.

Very rarely does Milton use a simile for relief. At times, however, he does introduce into a simile some element which suggests peace and tranquillity after a period of stress. Satan, following the coastline on his journey to Hell-Gates is compared to a merchant fleet sailing from Bengala, keeping close to the shore for fear of "equinoctial" storms.<sup>1</sup> The peaceful purpose of the merchants' journey is in direct contrast to the destructive intention of Satan's enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

Milton was the first epic poet to establish prolepsis as a definite narrative device.<sup>3</sup> Very often he refers to future events as if they had already taken place. His reference to the leviathan, implies the fact that the leviathan came to be regarded by the church as the symbol of an intentional deceiver. This is an instance of prolepsis, as are the references to the plague of locusts which fell upon Egypt (P.L. i, 338 - 343) and to the will-o-the-wisp which leads night-wanders astray. (ix, 634 - 42)<sup>4</sup>

1. P. L. ii, 636 - 42

2. The Miltonic Simile - Whaler - P.M.L.A. - 46:1055

3. Ibid. 1042

5. P. L. i, 201 - 209



Although Milton is never guilty of introducing an image into his scene, merely for decoration, all his similes have a delicacy and finish. This is due not so much to his choice of image as to the completeness with which he rounds out his comparison. Whatever may be their primary purpose as similes, all similes drawn from nature add a picturesque touch to the fable. The building of Xerxes bridge, the formation of Pandemonium compared to the working of an organ, Satan compared to a Scout, all these references add colour and interest.

Classifying the similes in the four poems according to the pattern to which they belong, it will be noticed that there are more similes of the simple pattern than of any other. Simple simile can be used in almost every type of writing, while complex simile is out of place in conversation.<sup>1</sup> Also, certain material is intractable to complex simile.<sup>2</sup> In all the books are to be found, short, swift similes which, in a few words, convey a definite impression. In "Comus," the speed with which the Attendant Spirit hastens to guide an adventurer in the wood is likened to "the sparkle of a glancing star."<sup>3</sup> Satan's fall from Heaven is compared to a flash of lightning.<sup>4</sup> Samson, bewailing his blindness says that, to him, the sun is "silent as the moon."<sup>5</sup>

Occasionally Milton provides variety in his use of the simple simile but using a variant pattern.<sup>6</sup> In P. L. ii, 659 - 61, S, the monsters which vex Scylla, is surpassed by A, the "Hell-Hounds" which torment Death, the porteress of Hell-Gates. In another case he uses a negative term in the simile. In P.L. i, 428 ff. the essence

1. Detached Similes in Miltonic Epics - Sherwin - Mod.Lang.Notes 36:3421

2. Ibid. 342

3. Comus - l 80

4. P.L. x, 140

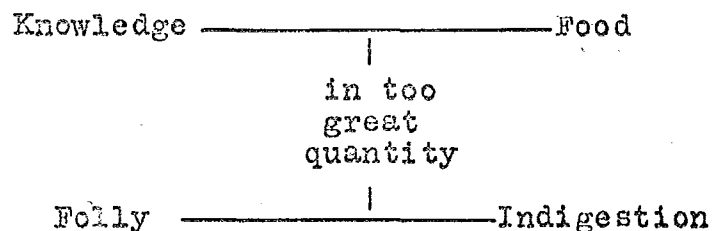
5. Samson Agonistes - l 86

6. The Miltonic Simile - Whaler - P.M.L.A. 46:1039

of a spiritual being is compared to that which is not flesh, that which has no bones, no joints nor limbs.

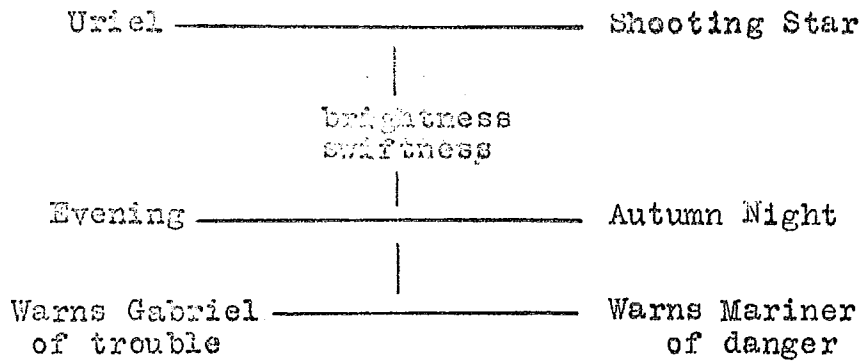
It is in the use of the complex simile that Milton has shown his skill as an artist. Complex simile lends itself admirably to passages where colourful description is necessary. The artist does not stop with one elaborate comparison but goes on from one to another. The resultant picture is one of great profusion. Of necessity such <sup>1</sup>similes must be drawn from myth, legend, history, science and travel.

Milton, as a logician, naturally prefers the complex pattern with perfect homology. Some complex similes are more complex in nature than others. <sup>2</sup>In P. L. vii, 126-130 there is an example of a comparatively simple form of the complex simile, where knowledge is compared to food. Just as a surfeit of food brings indigestion, so too much knowledge leads to folly.



Of a slightly more complicated form is the simile in P.L. iv, 555-560. Uriel, coming down through the air at evening to warn Gabriel of Satan's intrusion into the Garden, is compared to a star shooting through the heavens on an autumn evening, which phenomenon warns the mariner of the danger of storm in that direction. The plan would be:-

1. The Miltonic Simile - Whaler - P.M.L.A. - 1035
2. Ibid. 1041



Prolepsis also provides variety in the complex simile. This anticipating use of simile furnishes an element of climax, surprise or suspense.<sup>1</sup> Often the conclusion of the simile is only suggested, but so forcefully suggested that the reader cannot miss it. For instance, where Sin and Death building the bridge across Chaos are compared to Xerxes spanning the Hellespont, the reader will invariably recall the ultimate failure of the Persian expedition. That Sin and Death will finally suffer the same fate as Xerxes is the unwritten implication.<sup>2</sup>

In the use of the complex pattern with logical digression Milton shows more restraint. Never does he digress in any simile for the sole purpose of conveying a diverting picture. Sometimes an irrelevant detail makes the picture clearer. He compares Satan's huge shield to the moon seen through a telescope,<sup>3</sup> but he particularizes the picture by having the reader view it in imagination through Galileo's telescope from the top of Fesolè or in Valdarno, in the clear air of Italy. The conditions are ideal.<sup>4</sup> In another case Milton digresses by introducing a human being into the picture. In this way he hopes to arouse in the reader emotions desirable for comprehending the picture. The spears of Gabriels

1. The Miltonic Simile - Whaler - P.M.L.A. - 46:1042.

2. Ibid. 1049

3. P.L. i 287 - 91

4. The Miltonic Simile - Whaler - P.M.L.A. - 46:1058

Angelic Squadron, swaying in their manoeuvres under his leadership, are likened in number and movement to a field of ripe grain <sup>1</sup> swaying at the will of the wind. So far in the simile there is perfect homology but on heterogeneous detail is to follow. We see the plowman watching, apprehensive lest the heads be destroyed by the wind. In the plowman's apprehension we may realize <sup>2</sup> something of Satan's alarm as he watches the Angelic Host.

In choosing a simile from myth or legend the poet runs the risk of calling up in the reader's mind such a host of details associated with the image that the picture becomes blurred. In such a case Milton digresses in order to focus the reader's mind on the more important associations. <sup>3</sup> He will mention a few outstanding details, some of which will be homologous and some of which may be digressive. In P.L. ii, 943 - 47, Satan's journey through chaos is likened to the eager but laborious speed of the winged gryphon. The mere mention of the gryphon will call to mind a host of details concerning that fabled bird. In order to restrain the reader's imagination Milton digresses and confines his interest to that animal, part lion, part bird, which, according to Herodotus, guarded the gold-mines of Scythia from the Arimaspians. <sup>4</sup>

In other cases, every detail of S may be in perfect homology with A, but the motive underlying the action or circumstance <sup>5</sup> quite at variance with the motive underlying A. An example of this is the simile which has already been discussed, where Satan is compared to the traders' fleet. Again, Satan finally reaching Paradise, so restful after Hell, is compared to a city-dweller who

1. P.L. iv 980 - 85

2. The Miltonic Simile - P.M.L.A. 46:1057

3. The Miltonic Simile - Whaler - P.M.L.A. 46: 1052

4. Ibid. 1053

5. Ibid. - 1055

delights to find himself in the peace and quiet of the country.

Yet Satan's motive for leaving Hell is quite different from that of the city dweller for leaving the city.

There are comparatively few instances of the simile in complex pattern with four terms in ratio. An example of its use to express relative magnitude is found in P.L. ii, 1052 - 5, where the simile expresses the idea that the world compared to Heaven is as the smallest star compared to the moon. Again in P.L. vii, 132-33, we learn that Satan surpassed the other angels in brightness as Lucifer surpasses the stars in that respect.

A characteristic feature of Milton's style and one for which he has little classic precedent is his use of group or cluster<sup>2</sup> similes. In classic epic a compound simile seldom consists of more than two terms. The simile of the leaves and sedge etc. in P.L. i, 302 - 55, contains six terms. A compound simile of this length is unusual but it is not uncommon to find in Milton three or four similes grouped under a common A, r being common also. Milton avoids this type of simile for generalization for fear of running into<sup>3</sup> parable and prefers to compare A to a particular S, S', S".

Compound similes may consists of a group of simple similes or of a group where one or more member is complex. One of the most effective groups of simple similes is found in P.L. ii, 670 -.671, where the figure of Death is described as "black as night, fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell." In "Comus" l, 534, Comus and his "monstous rout" howling are compared to "stabbed wolves or tigers at their prey." In P.R. ii - 300, Satan appears the second time before Christ in the guise of one "in city, or court or palace bred."

1. P. L. ix. 445 ff.

2. Compounding and Distributing of Similes in Paradise Lost - Whaler-Mod. Philol. 28:317

3. Ibid. 28:314

Instances of compound similes with complex members are found more frequently in *Paradise Lost* than in the other poems. In P.L. i, 197 - 200, there occurs a compound simile of four terms, three simple and one complex. Satan is compared to Titan, to Briareos, to Typhon (all of which are simple terms) and to the leviathan, which term is expanded into a complex simile. In the famous cluster simile of P.L. i, 302-55, all six terms are complex. In P.R. iv, 10-20, there is an excellent example of a compound simile whose members are complex and are arranged climactically. Satan is compared, first, to a man of exceeding cunning, who, foiled, still continues his attempts to gain his end and always meets with failure. In his increasing persistence he is likened to flies about a wine-press which, though beaten off, return again and again. As he becomes more desperate he is compared to waves dashed to froth and bubbles against a rock yet ever renewing the assault.

In considering the two poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, one is struck by the uneven distribution of similes.<sup>1</sup> Long similes seem to be concentrated in relatively brief passages and in certain books there are very few similes. In Books i, ii, iv, and ix, of *Paradise Lost*, we find the greatest number of similes, while Books viii and xii contain the fewest. In *Paradise Regained* there are comparatively few similes in Books i, ii, iii while Book iv has<sup>2</sup> has many similes per quota of lines as any passage in *Paradise Lost*. With regard to number, "Comus" and *Samson Agonistes* are also poor in similes.

This irregularity in the distribution of similes in his two epic poems is quite intentional on Milton's part. It may be said that Milton has two styles which correspond to two qualities of

poetic inspiration.<sup>3</sup> The one style is highly coloured and figurative,

1. Ibid 323 3. A Milton Handbook - Hanford - Page 243 ff.

2. Detached Similes in Miltonic Epics - Sherwin - Mod. Lang. Notes 36:242

the other direct and relatively plain. Milton uses his abundant pictorial style particularly in Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*, where vivid description is necessary. In Books VIII and XII, which are largely conversation, he uses his barer style. Long complex simile is unnatural in conversation. In the books where the story is related by means of dialogue, such similes as are found, are usually short and simple and are closely connected with the narrative. In P.L. X, 1073, however, Adam makes use of the rather long simile of the clouds and the lightning.

Another feature which influences the distribution of the similes is the nature of the material with which the poet is dealing. Such characters as God, Christ, the Good Angels and all the Heavenly Host must be treated with convention because of their religious significance.<sup>2</sup> The poet is not free to recreate them in his imagination. However, Satan, the Bad Angels and Hell are richly suggestive of simile. Again, such subjects as the Council in Heaven, Raphael's discourse, the celestial battles and Satan's self-communion do not lend themselves to simile. To relate the celestial battles in terms such as are generally used to signify courage and ferocity - lion, tiger, etc., - would detract from the grandeur of the combatants.<sup>3</sup> For this reason Milton casts aside imagery and takes great pains that every word should count a deed or an action.

The piling up of similes in certain parts and their absence in other parts gives to the whole work the effect of a piece of baroque architecture.<sup>4</sup> The contrast in regularity merely accents the presence of similes when they do appear.

1. A Milton Handbook - Hanford - Page 243 ff.

2. Detached Similes in Milton's Epics - Sherwin - Mod. Lang. Notes 36 - 344

3. Compounding and Distributing of Simile in *Paradise Lost* - Whaler Mod. Philol. 28:324

4. Ibid. 28:327

There is great variety in the length of the similes used and this feature, too, is closely related to the subject-matter. The epic poems offer more opportunity for expanded simile than the mask or the dramatic poem. Straightforward narrative finds more room for long similes than conversation. In all the books of *Paradise Lost* short similes are to be found but the largest number of similes of four lines or more are to be found in Books I, II, IV and IX. In Books VIII and XII the similes are never more than three lines in length. Similes drawn from Biblical history, myth and natural phenomena run to the greatest length, often to seven or nine lines. In "*Comus*" the similes are usually of three lines or less. Occasionally there is a simile of four lines. Likewise in *Samson Agonistes* the similes are short. There are two exceptions, the ship simile, in lines 714 - 721, of eight lines and the phoenix simile, in lines 1698 - 1707, of ten lines. In the first three books of *Paradise Regained* the similes are not long. In Book IV there are instances of similes of four lines or more but they are not as colourful as those of *Paradise Lost*. The similes which make up the cluster-group, P.R. IV, 10-20, are very effective however.

Milton's choice of subject, again, has great influence on the type of simile he employs. His subject is a lofty one, remote and dignified. Great care must be exercised lest a simile drawn from too familiar circumstances detract from that dignity and remoteness.<sup>1</sup> With regard to source, Milton's similes fall into two broad categories. First is the group which the poet drew from his reading.<sup>2</sup> The second group includes those drawn from his practical experience and observation of the world about him.<sup>2</sup> His mythological references certainly comes from his reading, while his references to country life come from experience. At times it would seem that a simile belongs to both categories. In

1. Milton - Raleigh - p. 233

2. Detached Similes in Milton's Epics - Sherwin - Mod. Lang. Notes 36 - 345



describing the Serpent's skilful temptation of Eve, Milton compares him to "some orator renowned in Athens or Free Rome." Obviously the source of his comparison comes from his reading. When, however, he continues to expand the simile by describing the bearing and every gesture of the speaker, there is no doubt<sup>1</sup> that he is drawing from his personal observation.

These two general categories are again divided into smaller<sup>2</sup> and more arbitrary classes. Similes belonging to the first category may be classified as coming from Greek or Roman classics, the Scriptures, myth or legend or geographic material. Those belonging to the second class are drawn from human or natural material - the mountains, the sky, trees, plants or animals.

Milton's choice of imagery in his narrative is distinguished<sup>3</sup> from that of other poets. In the first place he had at his disposal a great store of classic history and folk-lore which the classical epicists did not have. Similes drawn from such sources are particularly suited to the high theme of Paradise Lost. Even in "Comus" there are several classical allusions in the form of simile. We find brief reference to Pan, to Narcissus, to Apollo, to the sons of Vulcan, to Daphne and to Jove. In lines 675-78, we find a somewhat longer simile drawn from the Odyssey, where the liquor Comus offers the lady is compared to that which Thone's wife gave to Helen on her way home to Troy. In Paradise Regained there are few instances classical allusions. There are references to Venus and Jove, to Ganymede, to Hylas and to Diana, but none are of great length, with the exception of one to Antoeus, P.R. IV, 562-67, and of another to the "Theban monster", *ibid*, 572-76.

1. Detached Similes on Milton's Epic - Sherwin - Mod.Lang.Notes 36: 345

2. *Ibid*. 346

3. Animal Simile in Paradise Lost - P.L.M.A. - 47:534

In Samson Agonistes the one classical simile is that of the phoenix.<sup>1</sup> It is in Paradise Lost that there is a wealth of classical simile. The Olympian games, the Gorgon, the Hydra, Scylla, Xerxes, Bacchus, Jove, Venus, Teneriff, Atlas, Circe, Cere and many others furnish the poet with material for his similes. Apparently Milton feared that ancient history might be too familiar for his theme at times and we find him giving to Vulcan the name Mulciber, the name by which men called him in "Ausonian land."<sup>2</sup>

Similes drawn from the Scriptures occur frequently in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes. This is quite natural in view of the religious nature of the subject material of these poems. Moses, Jacob, Aaron, Elijah, Jail, Samson and Job, are Biblical characters who furnish Milton with material for similes. The falling of the plague of locusts upon Egypt, the infidelity of Eli's sons, the destruction of Sodom, the safe journey of the Children of Israel to the Promised Land, the drowning of Pharaoh (Busiris) and his army, in the Red Sea, are events in Biblical history from which Milton draws his similes.

In Milton there is a noticeable lack of the animal simile which Homer and his followers use so frequently.<sup>3</sup> Probably Milton felt that the animal simile had had its day. At any rate animal images are obviously not suitable to portray celestial beings and activities. Milton reserved such figures for Satan and his Host. The wolf, the tiger, the dove, the vulture, the cormorant, the eagle, the lion, a herd of goats, a flock of sheep, bees and flies are figures which Milton employs in this kind of simile. In these similes Milton observes homology by insisting that, if A

1. Samson Agonistes - 1698 - 1707

2. "Milton" - Raleigh - 235

3. Animal Simile in Paradise Lost - Whaler - P.M.L.A. 47 - 535

includes moral qualities, S must also have those moral qualities.<sup>1</sup>  
 Satan is compared to the Leviathan.<sup>2</sup> As the Leviathan is chief of  
 the ocean animals, so Satan is chief of the fallen angels on the  
 fiery lake. As the Leviathan deceives the pilot into taking it  
 for a refuge, so Satan will deceive his fellow-fiends and mankind.  
 Again, Satan,<sup>3</sup> intent on vengeance, is likened to a vulture intent  
 on his prey. Satan's approach to Eden is compared to the approach  
 of a "prowling wolf" to a sheep-fold. Stalking through the garden,  
 he is compared to a lion but his attitude as he spies upon Adam  
 and Eve is like that of a tiger watching his prey and ready to spring.

Milton has used images drawn from insect life very  
 effectively on several occasions. Hell's Angels are likened to a  
 hive of bees.<sup>4</sup> Not only does this comparison emphasize the fact  
 that Satan's host is winged, but it also prepares for the trans-  
 formation which is about to take place in the size of these  
 creatures.<sup>5</sup> Previously in the poem this same band had been  
 compared to a swarm of locusts in a simile which also focuses  
 attention upon the fact that the band was winged. In Paradise  
 Regained, IV, 16 ff. Satan, in his persistent attempts to tempt  
 Christ, is compared to flies beat off from the wine-press, yet  
 returning time after time.

Similes having to do with plant life are as rare in Milton

1. Animal Simile in Paradise Lost - Whaler - P.M.L.A. - 534
2. P. L. II 200-208
3. P. L. III 431-39
4. P. L. I 768-75
5. The Miltonic Simile - Whaler - P.M.L.A. - 46-1051
6. P.L. I 338-43

as the animal simile, and for the same reasons. In *Paradise Lost* VII, 472-73, the rising of the flocks, fleeced and heating, at Creation, is compared to the springing up of a plant. In *Paradise Lost* I, 292 ff., Satan's spear is compared in size to the tallest Norwegian pine which will some day serve as mast for a great ship. Satan's host, fallen from glory and bereft of their brightness, are likened to the tall pine or oak trees standing bare and desolate after the lightning has singed their tops.<sup>1</sup> In "*Comus*," l. 743 ff. Beauty, hoarded and not enjoyed, is compared to a rose which, if neglected, withers. Again, Manoah's hope that Samson might be freed, now blasted by the news of his death, is compared to the first flowers of spring which prove abortive after being nipped by an early frost.<sup>2</sup> In *P.L.* IV 307, the ringlets of Eve's hair are compared to the tendrils of a vine. Another effective simile drawn from plant life is in *P.L.* I, 302, where Satan's host is compared to leaves.

The sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, and all phenomena connected with them are a rich source of simile. From their very nature they repel intimacy and so are particularly suited to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.<sup>3</sup> To convey the impression of swiftness, of brightness or of great number Milton frequently employs star-simile. Hence we have in "*Comus*," l. 80, the simile "swift as the sparkle of a glancing star," and again in *P.L.* IV 555, the phrase "Swift as a shooting star." In *P.L.* III 60, the simile, "The sanctities of Heaven stood thick as stars", draws attention to the great numbers of the Heavenly Host. Another such simile is found in *P.L.* V 741-2, where we see "a host, innumerable as the stars of night." The longest and most complex of the star-similes occurs in *P.L.* V, 620 - 27, where the dance of the celestial throng is likened

1. *P.L.* I 612-15

2. *Samson Agonistes* - 1576

3. "*Milton*" - Raleigh - 234

to the motions of the stars and the planets "mazes intricate, eccentric, intervolv'd yet regular."

The moon and stars are combined in one of the similes, belonging to pattern four in P.L. II, 1052-53. This simile has already been discussed. In *Samson Agonistes* the moon is again employed in simile where Samson says "The sun to me is dark and silent as the moon."<sup>1</sup>

The sun is the source of a long, complex simile. In P.L. I, 594-99, Satan's brightness, dimmed after his fall, is compared to that of the sun shining through a morning mist. Again, when Satan arrives at the Sun's Orb, he is struck by the fact that there is no shadow in all that brightness. As if to explain this, Milton recalls to the reader's mind the well-known fact that when the sun shines down directly on the equator at noon there are no shadows.

To convey the picture of intense brightness Milton has made use of the comet in simile. Satan, unterrified before Death at Hell-Gates, "burned like a comet."<sup>2</sup> The sword of God in the Garden at the time of the expulsion of Adam and Eve "blazed fierce as a comet."<sup>3</sup>

Morning, noon, night and evening are also used in simile. Night is employed to emphasize the impression of darkness, of blackness, of stillness and gloom. Morning and noon, on the other hand, give a picture of brightness and cheerfulness.

The clouds, the winds, the mist and the lightning have been used by Milton in his similes. Satan and Death, confronting one another at Hell-Gates are compared to two black clouds, awaiting the signal of the winds to begin combat.<sup>4</sup> In P.L. II 285-90, the murmur which arose among the fallen angels, after Belial's speech,

1. *Samson Agonistes* 87 - 88

2. P.L. II 708

3. P.L. XII 634

4. P.L. II 714 - 18

is compared to the sound of the winds retained by hollow rocks after the tempest has died, down, which sound lulls to sleep the worn-out mariner who has taken refuge near by. Satan creeping<sup>1</sup> stealthily through the Garden at night is likened to "a black mist" As Adam and Eve are driven out of Paradise, the progress of the Cherubim over the earth is compared to the gliding of an evening mist risen from the river, closing in upon the labourer as he returns home.<sup>2</sup> In P. L. II, 184, Satan's fall from Heaven is compared to the descent of a flash of lightning.

The sea, quite frequently a stormy sea, is the source of some of Milton's most picturesque similes. In P. L. VII, 212 ff. Chaos is described as a sea where furious winds whip the waves mountain high. In P. R. IV, 18-20, Satan who, in spite of previous failure to tempt Christ, renews his attempts again and again is compared to waves beating against indomitable rock, which dashed back return again. In P. L. I, 202, we see a "night-foundered skiff" casting anchor beside the leviathan, Samson compares the failure he has made of his life to the wreck of a beautifully-rigged ship.<sup>3</sup> Again, in Samson Agonistes, 713 ff. Dalila's approach is likened to that of a stately ship coming from Tarsus with sails filled and streamers waving. Satan, preening himself and exhibiting all his attractions in order to win Eve's attention, is compared to a skillful sailor who shifts his sail as the wind shifts and guides his vessel successfully into some river's mouth or past some headland.<sup>4</sup>

In some cases Milton draws his similes from human life.

1. IX, 179

2. XII, 629-32

3. Samson Agonistes, 198-99

4. P. L. IX, 513-15

Satan, looking down on Paradise, is compared to a scout.<sup>1</sup> Breaking into the Garden he is compared to a thief.<sup>2</sup> Tempting Eve in the Garden, his skilful use of gesture and argument is likened to that of a Greek or Roman orator.<sup>3</sup>

In making use of an image Milton reserves that image to convey one impression only. Thus bees, sands, stars and leaves are used to emphasize great number. Brightness is interpreted in terms of the sun, the stars, a comet, a fiery furnace, morning or noon. Scenes of combat and of hardship are described in terms of storm and rough seas. Speed is emphasized by references to the falling star or to lightning. The star simile, is employed for three different reasons - to convey the idea of number, the impression of speed and also of brightness. As a rule, however, a certain figure is used only in one connection.

The various respects in which the Miltonic simile differs from the Homeric simile may be traced to one great fundamental difference.<sup>4</sup> Milton's method of exact homologation is the key the every departure of Milton from epic precedent.<sup>4</sup> Homer abounds in animal simile and in figures from humble life. He uses relief simile frequently and myth simile scarcely at all. He has little concern for homology as long as there is a picture in S S' S" etc. As a result his similes present clear-cut pictures, many details of which are vaguely or in no way connected with the fable. Milton's desire for homology affects the very choice of his images. There must be a logical relation between A and S. He carries homologation to such a point that the simile becomes an organic part of the narrative.<sup>5</sup>

1. P. L. III 543 ff.

2. P. L. IV 188 ff.

3. IX 670 ff.

4. The Miltonic Simile - Whaler - P.M.L.A. 46 - 1068

5. Ibid 1070

A and S. expand each other reciprocally and often a detached relationship between them can be interpreted only in terms of prolepsis. Milton's similes have no rivals in previous epics with respect to their homology, to the group or cluster similes arranged climactically and to the effective irregularity of distribution of those groups.



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