

Preface

Although there are many excellent studies of Homer's similes, a collection has not been published since W. C. Green's *The Similes of Homer's Iliad* (London 1877). The following compendium includes all the similes of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, with the Greek text first, along with a literal English translation of the Greek hexameters. For this purpose we have relied heavily on the text and translations in Perseus.¹ We have followed Lee's List A (D. J. N. Lee, *The Similes of the Iliad and the Odyssey Compared*, Melbourne University Press, 1964) in making our initial compilation of similes, with asterisks denoting others not found in his list. References are added to scholarly works that are particularly relevant. At the beginning of each book a tabulation is provided to show which similes depict scenes and which are merely short phrases. Following the similes is a section containing "Similar Rhetorical Figures" such as "Transformations and Disguises" and "Divine Comparisons". Our collection contains 344 similes from the *Iliad* and 128 from the *Odyssey*. The Introduction that follows provides details about defining similes and distinguishing them from other rhetorical figures².

¹Perseus Digital Library. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>. We have modernized and altered the translations as appropriate. For the *Iliad*, these are credited to Samuel Butler (1898) and an unidentified translator from 1924 (? A. T. Murray in the *Loeb Classical Library*). For the *Odyssey*, these are credited to Samuel Butler (1900 ?) revised by Timothy Power and Gregory Nagy.

² The idea of making a compendium of Homeric similes began in the fall of 2014. A small group of friends who enjoy classical Greek literature in the original Greek read much of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together. At one point it became clear that there was no single source to consult which would supply the similes that come up so frequently in these poems, although there are many commentaries, articles and chapters of books devoted to them. Our topic evolved from this consideration. Although most group members did not have time to work regularly on the book, helpful discussions provided much inspiration for the three of us who completed this task. For this we would like to gratefully acknowledge the other members of this class: Michie Hunt, Suzanne Legault, Hardee Mahoney, Ted Perlman, Sandy Soundararajan.

Introduction

A–What is a Simile?

A.1 Since we began with the very helpful list of similes in Lee’s book (cited above), we did not have immediate concerns about what a simile is. But we soon found other similes not contained in Lee’s list so that we did have to confront that question eventually. Most of the similes in Homer reflect the common definition of an explicit comparison of two essentially unlike things (or *figurative* comparison), e.g. ὁ δ’ ἦϊε νυκτὶ ἐοικώς = “And he <Apollo> came like night” (*Iliad* 1.47). Traditional terminology refers to the three basic parts of similes as *tenor* (ὁ / he), *prothesis* (ἐοικώς / like), and *vehicle* (νυκτὶ / night). There are numerous ways to say “like” in Greek (see Appendix III). In some cases the prothesis is not a separate word but contained in adjective (see Appendix III.2): τοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ γλώσσης μέλιτος γλυκίων ῥέεν αὐδὴ (*Iliad* 1.249) — “From his tongue flowed speech sweeter than honey”; or θάσσονας ἰρήκων ἔμεναι καλλιτρίχας ἵππους — “[You will pray that] your fair-maned horses be swifter than falcons” (*Iliad* 13.819). We have also added the term *apothesis* to identify the word that often introduces the tenor: (“just like (ἡὔτε - *prothesis*) thick tribes of bees (*vehicle*) / that come from some hollow rock ever anew / and fly in clusters over the spring flowers, / some darting en masse here, others there; even so (ὥς - *apothesis*) did their many tribes (*tenor*) march in line from the ships” (*Iliad* 2.87).

A.2 Many comparative constructions appear to be similes in form but the vehicle is merely factual and informative, not figurative, such as the following:

There was not anyone like (ὁμοῖος) him.

Iliad 14.521

οὐ μὲν γάρ τί πού ἐστιν οἰζυρώτερον ἀνδρὸς.

For surely there is nothing anywhere more miserable than man.

Iliad 17.446

Moreover, the poems include numerous instances when deities (or other characters) take on the appearance of specific human beings. For example, several times in Book Two of the *Iliad* the gods take on other shapes: e.g. Athena as a herald (line 280), or Iris as Polites (line 791). We have listed such passages in the “Similar Rhetorical Figures” section under the heading “Transformations and Disguises”. Appendix IX provides a further listing of the Transformations and Disguises.

A.3 Another category not counted as similes is similar but more problematic: when humans are compared to deities. Often these are simple epithets meaning “god-like” (e.g. θεοειδής, ἀντίθεος, θεῖος, ἰσόθεος). In other expressions, however, mortals are portrayed acting like, appearing like or being treated like deities. Examples include:

αἰνῶς ἀθανάτησι θεῆς εἰς ὧπα ἕοικεν.

‘She is dreadfully like immortal goddesses to look on.’ Trojan elders speaking about Helen

Iliad 3.158

Ἰδομενεὺς δ’ ἐτέρωθεν ἐνὶ Κρήτεσσι θεὸς ὧς

ἔστηκ’, ἀμφὶ δέ μιν Κρητῶν ἀγοὶ ἠγερέθονται.

Idomeneus on the other side amid the Cretans stood like a god, / and about him were gathered the leaders of the Cretans.

Iliad 3.230–231

ἐκ δ' Ἑλένη θαλάμοιο θυώδεος ὑψορόφοιο

ἦλυθεν Ἀρτέμιδι χρυσηλακάτῳ ἔικυῖα.

Out of her fragrant high-roofed chamber / came Helen, like Artemis of the golden
arrows.

Odyssey 4.121–122

Lee lists the second (citing six more examples) and third excerpts above as similes but not the first. He also counts the following underlined phrase as a simile at *Iliad* 5.438 and cites eight other passages where it appears:

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ τὸ τέταρτον ἐπέσσυτο δαίμονι ἴσος.

But when for the fourth time he rushed upon him like a god.

Since there are so many examples of this type (and many are essentially epithets), we have decided not to include these comparisons to divinities in our listing of similes, but instead have listed examples under the heading of “Divine Comparisons” in the “Similar Rhetorical Figures” section for each book. A more complete listing of Divine Comparisons is provided in Appendix VIII. The distinction admittedly is arbitrary since, if the final expression were “like a lion” instead of “like a god”, we would consider it a simile.

A.4 There is also the question of metaphors. Simile and metaphor are not necessarily contradictory terms since metaphor is an expression of meaning (a shift in meaning), whereas simile is a grammatical construction consisting of two nouns (*tenor* and *vehicle*) that are compared figuratively, usually joined by a *prothesis* (“like” or “as”). Similes make things clearer; metaphors make them more familiar (establishing a bond between the speaker and listener, perhaps avoiding an unpleasant word or alluding to something well-known, playing on the double meaning of a word): “You [sea nymphs] now plunge into the wide bosom

(κόλπον) of the sea (θαλάσσης)” (*Iliad* 18.140). “The gods spun the skein (ἔπεκλώσαντο) of destruction (ὄλεθρον) for men” (*Odyssey* 8.579). In a metaphor a word or phrase is used in reference to something to which it is not literally applicable (“bosom” of the sea or “spin” destruction). In a simile the word or phrase is literal, but the comparison is figurative “Apollo came like (ἔοικώς) night”, thus different from factual comparisons (e.g., “There was not anyone like (ὁμοῖος) him.” In general, we have not listed metaphors except as examples.

A.5 We have included one group of similes under the heading “Protheses of Abstract Qualities” (see Appendix III.A.3 and III.B.3), which may be a less familiar category. Most of these indicate comparisons that depend upon such abstract qualities as distance, quantity and volume. Lee includes many of these in his List A. They occur throughout; both epics have correlative prothesis and apothesis (e.g., ὅσση . . . τόσσον). Examples:

ὅσση δ' αἰγανέης ῥιπή ταναοῖο τέτυκται, / . . . τόσσον ἐχώρησαν Τρῶες.

As far as is the flight of a long javelin . . . so far did the Trojans draw back.

Iliad 16.589: distance

τὴν δὲ γυναῖκα / εὖρον, ὅσσην τ' ὄρεος κορυφήν

They found there his <Laestrygonian Antiphates's> wife, / as big as the peak of a
mountain

Odyssey 10.113: size

B–How Many Similes Are There In Homer?

B.1 After pointing out our general policy for identifying similes, it is instructive to compare scholarly opinions on total numbers. As Wilkins 1920:147 stated it in the preface to her list:

For one thing, the number of similes so presented is somewhat larger than the figures ordinarily given. Ludwig Friedlander [*Zwei Homerische Wörterverzeichnisse* 788 (Leipzig 1860)] gives for the *Iliad* 182 detailed similes, 17 comparatively short, and 27 of the very briefest compass [note 4] — or, if we combine the first two numbers, 199 fairly long, and 27 short. If we make proper subtractions for passages containing more than one object of comparison, this classification reveals 218 similes which form a complete clause or sentence, or have at least one modifying clause, and 124 occurring in a mere phrase of one or two words only. So too, for the *Odyssey*, Friedlander gives 45 long similes and 13 short, while our figures are 53 and 76 respectively.³ In the case of the brief similes there are naturally many repetitions, but by a conservative count they are drawn from at least 52 different sources in the *Iliad* and 40 in the *Odyssey*. Instances of the actual verbal repetition of the longer ones are few — at most 2 in the *Odyssey* and 6 in the *Iliad*.

Note 4: *Zwei Homerische Wörterverzeichnisse* 788 (Leipzig, 1860). Friedlander's figures are based on a list of similes (786 ff.) in which he follows a similar one by G. F. C. Gunther in *Athenaeum*, etc.

B.2 Lee 1964:3 also cites Friedländer's numbers before giving his own figures (with different terminology: Internal = simple and Full = long): “From my classification the following figures emerge: *Odyssey*, Internal 72 (plus 15 “other” . . .), Full 45; *Iliad*, Internal 133 (plus 20 . . .) and 197 Full.” Lee does not count as similes “such a phrase as $\Delta\iota\ \mu\eta\tau\iota\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\tau\acute{\alpha}\lambda\alpha\nu\tau\omicron\nu$ ” (*Iliad* 2.169).

³ By our count of Friedländer's listings on 786–788 the numbers are slightly higher: 233 for the *Iliad* (189 + 17 + 27) and 54 total in the *Odyssey* (34 + 7 + 13).

B.3 Both Scott and Fränkel give lists of similes in their Appendices that also provide additional information about each simile. By counting the similes cited one can easily determine the totals for each. For Fränkel 1921:116–119 the figures are 399 (*Iliad*) and 139 (*Odyssey*); for Scott 1974:191–205 they are 341 (*Iliad*) and 123 (*Odyssey*). The citations do not distinguish between short and long similes. Fränkel’s categories refer to sections of his book in Part II, pp16–97 (A–L: A. *Die Elementargewalten*, B. *Bäume und Pflanzen*, C. *Der Fedlbau*, etc. – L. “*Götter*”). Scott indicates the first line of each simile as well as the context (e.g. ‘Journey’ or ‘Measurement’) and the subject matter (e.g. Lion or Fire). Again, the differences in numbers are primarily due to classifying some passages as similes which we call “Divine Comparisons” or “Transformations and Disguises”.

B.4 De Jong 2012:21 says more generally that of “the c. 200 similes in the *Iliad* only six are repeated verbatim (in the *Odyssey* the figure is two out of forty).”⁴ She adds that “[m]ost extended similes take one of the following three forms:” (1) “X did Y, like a . . . ; thus X did Y:” “(22.22–4; 26–32 and 308–11 have the same structure.)” p22: (2) “X did Y. As (when) a . . . : thus X did Y:” (22.92–7; cf. 138–44). (3) “As (when) a . . . ; thus X did Y:” “(22.162–6; cf. 189–93, 199–201, 317–2).”

B.5 Thus in summary, our list of 344 similes from the *Iliad* may be compared to:

226 (Freidländer 1860); 342 (Wilkins 1920); 399 (Fränkel 1921); 350 (Lee 1964); 341 (Scott 1974); ca. 200 (De Jong 2012).

Our list totals 128 from the *Odyssey*, compared to:

58 (Freidländer 1860); 129 (Wilkins 1920); 139 (Fränkel 1921); 132 (Lee 1964); 123 (Scott 1974); 40 extended (De Jong 2012).

⁴ De Jong’s numbers reflect those of Bassett 1921:132: “There are about 200 in the *Iliad* and about 40 in the *Odyssey*.”

From the preceding discussion one can see why the totals vary, although there would be little difference in the count of the longer (and traditional) Homeric similes. Thus these figures serve as relative indicators dependent on the various guidelines for defining similes.

C-Conventions and Symbols Used In the Compendium

C.1 The similes are identified by book number, index number, and the line number of the prothesis. The index numbers identify the sequence of similes through each book. The index number and line number alone are used to identify similes in cases where the book number is obvious from context, such as in the summary of the similes at the beginning of each book in the Compendium. Thus, Book 1 #2 (104) refers to simile index number 2 found in Book 1 with a prothesis at line 104 of Book 1. In the summary at the beginning of Book 1 in the Compendium, this simile is referred to by #2 (104). An asterisk (*) is added to the index number to identify a simile that is not included Lee's List A.

C.2 For each book in the Compendium, a summary of the similes in the book is included before the more detailed listing. This summary distinguishes between similes that are "Short Clauses and Phrases" and similes that describe longer "Scenes". In the Appendices, these two groupings of similes are distinguished by adding a plus symbol (+) to the simile identifier of Scene similes. In some cases the distinction between "Short Clauses and Phrases" and "Scenes" is somewhat arbitrary since occasionally short similes do indicate a scene. In any case, it seems useful to distinguish between fully developed similes and short phrases. (Lee does this even more precisely in his List A, citing the number of feet and/or verses.)

C.3 After the summary, the listing of each simile in the compendium includes the Greek text from Perseus, an English translation, and a summary of the parts of the simile. The following identifies the conventions used in the listing.

C.3.1 In the Greek text, the prothesis, tenor and, vehicle are underlined. Italics are occasionally used to call attention to the same word used in both tenor and vehicle of the Greek text:

αἱ δ' ὑπολευκαίνονται ἀχυρμαί: ὡς τότε Ἄχαιοι

λευκοὶ ὕπερθε γέγοντο κονισάλω . . .

And the **heaps of chaff grow white**; even so then did the **Achaean** / **grow white** over head and shoulders beneath the cloud of dust.

Iliad Book 5 #8 (502–503)

C.3.2 In the translation, the prothesis, tenor, and vehicle are highlighted in bold. The following conventions have been used in the translation:

/

A forward slash is added to identify the end of a hexameter in the Greek.

[...]

Words in square brackets are implied by the Greek but not explicitly stated. These words are typically added to make the translation more understandable.

< . . >

Names in angled brackets are added after a pronoun to identify who is meant by the pronoun in cases where it is not apparent from the excerpted Greek and the translation.

C.3.2 In the summary of each simile at the start of each book and after the translation, the three parts of the simile (tenor, prothesis and vehicle) are summarized in square brackets as in the following:

[Agamemnon's eyes ≈ blazing fire] Narrator

The following conventions are used in these summaries:

≈

The approximately equal symbol indicates the prothesis of a simile.

NOT ≈

Some similes identify that the tenor is *not* like the vehicle. For such similes, NOT has been added to the approximately equal symbol.

>

The > symbol is used to signify “is to” in the tenor and vehicle as in *Iliad* Book 8 #1*

(16):

‘[Tartarus] as far beneath Hades as heaven is above earth.’

[Tartarus > Hades ≈ heaven > earth] Zeus

The name after the summary identifies who is the speaker of the simile. In the examples above, “Narrator” refers to Homer, and Zeus is the speaker of the simile about Tartarus.

C.4 Discussions of individual similes may be found in the various commentaries *ad loc.* and are not generally included here.