1941

Milton's Use of the Epic Simile in Paradise Lost

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MILTON'S USE
OF THE
EPIC SIMILE
IN
PARADISE LOST
by
Francis Louis Martinsek, S.J.
JUNE 1941

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY
VITA AUCTORIS

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L.D.S.
Milton's Use of the Epic Simile

Introduction

After Homer the expanded simile became almost a convention with writers of epics. They all have felt obliged by the canons of their art to sprinkle their poems with these tokens of their homage to the ancient great. The intent of this thesis is to find to what extent Milton used epic similes as a mere sign of his submission to the rules of epic structure and to what extent he wrought those similes as integral parts of his masterpiece.

The first step toward determining the part played by the expanded simile in that masterpiece is the analysis of the simile in its origins, rhetorical and psychological. Understanding its nature, we can understand the next step, the analysis of its various functions. From the study of the functions of the epic simile in general we shall pass to the study of the similes found in Paradise Lost, their sources, their particular functions, and, finally, their effect on Milton's style. It is to be hoped that this procedure will cast a clearer light on Milton's use of the epic simile and deepen the reader's appreciation of Paradise Lost.
CHAPTER I

The Family Tree of the Epic Simile

Rhetoricians have analyzed and labeled the various possible ways of using language to express an idea. It must be born in mind that this process of classification and denomination is an a posteriori process. That is to say, rhetoricians, by the study and analysis of great works of literature, have been able to discover a certain constancy in the natural and spontaneous employment of the elements of language. This constancy is due to the fact that there are a limited number of effective manners of expression. The rhetoricians have studied these both in their make-up and in their effectiveness; the results of their studies they formed into categories and rules, intended in their minds chiefly for the instruction and training of writers and speakers. A second purpose of these rules and categories, though not intended primarily by the rhetoricians, is the deeper knowledge and appreciation of the works of literature on the part of the reader. It is with this intention that this analysis of the epic simile as found in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is made.

To begin with, two distinct manners in which authors wrought their language into effect thought-symbols strike even the passing inquirer. The first is a plain and direct statement of the idea; Water is made up of hydrogen and oxygen. The advantage of this manner lies in the elimination of ambiguity
and in a preciseness of expression, qualities so necessary to clear philosophical and scientific communications. The second manner of expression is the indirect or oblique; that is, a word or group of words is used not in its literal and plain meaning but as it is applied to another object. The general term used in labeling this manner of expression is figure of speech. It is a turning of a word from its usual meaning to the expression of an idea in some way connected with that first meaning. When this turning of meaning into another channel is used with regard to a single word, the term trope is applied in its strictest sense. Thus, when Milton describes the moon of Paradise, that

"Rising in cloudy majesty, at length
Apparent queen unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw,"

(Paradise Lost, Book IV, ll.606-9)

the individual words, majesty, queen, unveiled, and mantle, are tropes, used to marvelous advantage. At the same time this passage, taken as a whole, is a beautiful example of a figure of speech which is not limited to single words. Here majesty is ascribed to the moon, which does not possess majesty in the ordinary sense; but its progress through the sky resembles the stately bearing of a queen.

Further, the example above illustrates very well some of the advantages to be gained by the use of figures of speech. First, the atmosphere of calm and peace of night in Eden garden is enriched by the comparison, and the vision of the moon is enhanced by all the visual and emotional associations proper to
majesty in a queen. Besides this there is a richness of language due to this figure. These two advantages, enrichment of language and heightening of emotional content, are derived from the nature of the specific figure used. Others give these same advantages and add a further one in the clarity which they impart to more abstract ideas. This occurs, for example, when Milton narrates Adam's eager desire for further knowledge of Paradise,

"When, and whereof created, for what cause,
What within Eden or without was done
Before his memory, as one whose drouth
Yet scarce allay'd still eyes the current stream
Whose liquid murmur heard new thirst excites,"

(P.L. VII, 64-68)

Still another advantage of this unliteral manner of speech consists in the emphasis which can be placed upon an idea, which, when stated baldly, must rely on its own clarity for its effect. The Heavenly Father has accepted the offer of His Divine Son to ransom mankind.

"So heavenly love shall outdo hellish hate,
Giving to death, and dying to redeem,
So dearly to redeem what hellish hate
So easily destroyed,....."

(P.L. III, 298-301)

The juxtaposition of contrasted ideas, another striking use of figurative language, lends clarity and force to a concept otherwise less moving. Milton speaks of God in his glory, while

".......through a cloud
Drawn round about thee like a radiant shrine,
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear;...."

(P.L. III, 378-380)

The variety of passages quoted here to exemplify the
workings of the figurative manner of speech leads one on to a further division of this manner of expression. It will be noticed that the first two passages present the reader with a picture, an image, with definite emotional and conceptual associations. The next two consist in a manipulation of words so as to render the thought more striking. With this difference in mind, we can lay out a twofold division of the figurative manner of expression. The first we shall term imagination; the second, verbal emphasis. Imagination as a form of expression lends itself with ease and excellent results to the imaginative elements of poetry. This is the mode of expression chiefly employed by the poet, though the image used depends upon the individual psychological character of the poet. The second mode, by emphasis through verbal relationships, is more properly the instrument of the rhetorician, and draws largely on the intellectual and calculating portion of the artist's make-up. In this paper we shall henceforth deal exclusively with figures of the imaginative type.

As was hinted before, the figures of the imaginative type depend on the type of the artist's imagination. The contents of the imagination are chiefly auditory or visual, while the other senses are represented in some greater or less degree of development. The reason for this limitation of the imagination to two chief sense perceptions lies in the facile relations that arise between these two senses and the intellect. Saint Augustine says 1, and Saint Thomas follows him in that theory.
that there are certain traces of the intellect in these two senses. By training, the poet's imagination is stored with vivid images acquired through either one or the other of these senses, or both. Let us say that Milton had both in an excellent degree, even though he did lose his sight in later life. Milton, as all poets, was observant of detail in everything he saw, in everything he heard. What he saw stored the coffers of his imagination with pictures, which could be made to spring back into consciousness by some point of similarity with an idea to be expressed. The result was a simile, a metaphor, a picture which served to enhance and enrich the poetic qualities of the thought-element present to the mind. The sounds he heard, the music he delighted in gave birth to images which served to clothe his thoughts in comeliness.

This store of images is the source of the epic simile. To understand this further division of the figurative mode of expression we must analyze the simile in general. This will best be done by distinguishing it from the metaphor, the psychological genesis and even essence of which is identified with that of the simile. We said above that an image is brought back into consciousness from the hidden treasures of the imagination conservans by means of some connection with the concept directly on hand. In the case of the metaphor or simile this connection is that of similitude. Thus the action of Satan, as he is surprised by the militant angels in Eden,
reminds the poet of the flash of gunpowder.

"Up he starts,
Discovered and surprised. As when a spark
Lights on a heap of nitrous powder, laid
Fit for the tun, or some magazine to store
Against a rumored war, the smutty grain,
With sudden blaze diffused, inflames the air.
So started up, in his own shape, the Fiend."

(P.L. IV, 813-819)

Thus far the simile and metaphor have the same genesis. The difference comes only in the outward expression of the similitude.

The metaphor expresses this similitude by way of a direct substitution of the suggested image for the primary concept; for example, Milton saw a striking similarity between the flaying arms and legs and beating wings of Satan and the pull on oar and the straining and flapping of ship's sails.

".......nigh foundered on he fares,
Treading the crude consistence, half on foot,
Half flying; behooves him now both oar and sail."

(P.L. II, 940-942)

Instead of making an obvious statement of the similitude, he merely substitutes the objects suggested by the principal idea in place of the principal idea. There are certain advantages to be gained by this turn of figure. The movement of the scene is speeded up, and the mind of the reader is pleased by the transition it makes at the mere suggestion of the poet. There is a suddenness and a suggestiveness which are the results of real artistry.

When the image suggested by the principal idea is
stated expressly as related to that idea by similitude, we have the simile. The distinction between the simile and metaphor may be seen in the figures used in the following passage.

"He, Chaos, ceased; and Satan stayed not to reply, But glad that now his sea should find a shore, With fresh alacrity and force renewed Springs upward, like a pyramid of fire, Into the wild expanse, ....."

(P.L. II, 1010-1018)

The second figure is introduced by the word like; there is some point of similarity between the take-off of Satan and the sudden burst of fire. With the image of fire before us we are enabled to picture the speed, the blaze of the hellish spirit, perhaps even the sight and smell of smoke and fumes—all suggested by the one phrase, "pyramid of fire". By means of the explicit term of similitude (like, as, comparing) the images suggested by the principal idea becomes a simile; when this term remains implicit and the image is substituted, we have a metaphor. Thus a metaphor has been termed an implied simile. In the passage given above, sea and shore are examples of the metaphor.

When does an explicit comparison or statement of similitude become an epic simile? The difference between the ordinary simile and the epic simile in genesis lies in the attitude of the poet's mind toward the image presented. The poet man, on the one hand, be so engrossed in the communication of the principal idea that all the materials of his imagination must be devoted and subordinated to the expression of this idea.
When a colorful image is suggested in illustration of his primary concern, he picks out the significant detail and restricts his simile entirely to the task of making the leading idea clear, emotionally rich, and beautiful in all its associations. The result is an ordinary simile, to-the-point and artistically effective; for example, Milton touches off with one apt word a description of the rumble of the damned angels as they rise to honor Satan:

"Their rising all at once was as the sound of thunder heard remote."

(P.L. II, 476-477)

On the other hand, the poet's attitude to the simile may be one of playfulness, but a playfulness which need not necessarily lead him astray, to be so engrossed in the image suggested that the main thought is neglected for it. A particular image may have only one point of similarity with the idea the poet wishes to transmit, but of itself it is so attractive that the poet goes on to describe the vision, as it were, in its own right. Detail after detail may be added to the description, each one apparently unrelated with the primary idea which suggested the picture. Such is the epic simile.

Obviously there are two manners in which such a simile can be developed. The first makes of the image a mere ornament to an otherwise bare action or description; the effect of this treatment is distraction, and it manifests a lack of due poetic synthesis. This was the defect of those
who copied what was in Homer a virtue without going through the process of genuine poetic composition. It can be said with truth, however, that Milton was not among the number of these superficial imitators of the art of Homer. The second manner of developing the simile is that which characterizes the true poet. In the section immediately following this treatment of the lineage of the epic simile, this second manner of employing the epic simile will find fuller development, along with the discussion of the various purposes of the simile.

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Note to Chapter I

1. De Ordine, B. II, c. 11, n. 34
CHAPTER II

The Function of the Simile

In approaching the question of the various purposes for which the epic simile can be employed, we must bear in mind a warning similar to that given at the beginning of the preceding section. We must not conceive of the poet as explicitly adverting to the varied potentialities of this or that epic simile and choosing now this effect, now that. A certain habitual understanding of the possibilities inherent in the simile in general and the epic simile in particular, together with a facility in handling similes, is presupposed in the poet. When the inspiration takes hold of the poet, these training rules, as it were, become subconscious guides; the employment of specific, particular similes, however, is due to the inspiration and to the poet's realization of the demands his inspiration makes on his powers of expression. The poet uses epic similes under pressure, so to say, of this realization, with the result that any simile is a natural and spontaneous creation.

What are we to do, then, who wish to study just how epic similes can be used in the composition of a poem? We must, as was said before, work a posteriori, hoping not to kill by dissection. When we say that Milton used epic similes for some specific purpose, we can refer either to his abstracted appreciation of the value and effects of the simile in general,
or to the explicit effect produced by his inspired use of a given simile. Our procedure will be, first, to view the general purposes of the epic simile as they pass through Milton's mind, let us say, while he leisurely studies in his garden at Horton. In the sections which follow this we shall see the living embodiments of these general purposes and the warm glow that the similes impart to their contexts.

A discussion of the functions of the expanded simile must begin with an enumeration, at least, of the functions of the simile in general. There should follow, then, an investigation of just which of the general functions can be filled by the epic simile.

Father Stephen J. Brown, S.J.,¹ approaches the discussion of the functions of the simile in general by distinguishing an intellectual, an emotional, and an aesthetic function. We can adopt his divisions and begin with the intellectual function, though his understanding of it will need some modification. The intellectual function, as he understands it, is too limited for our purposes, since it would apply only to the clarification of abstract ideas. We must broaden its meaning to include any influence that the simile may have on the intellect, as contrasted with the will and the emotions.

Among the tasks to be performed by the simile we find that of illustration, a function that is rooted in the
essence of the simile, the expression of similitude. Obviously, then, the simile will always illustrate its term, which may be a sense object, such as Satan's orbed shield, or an abstract concept, such as knowledge. Midway between the abstract and the concrete we might place certain real relations which exist between persons or things; for example, Satan's dimmed glory as compared with the lesser glory of his partners in rebellion. These relations often need clarification, and the simile is an apt means to that end.

Besides the ever-present and essential function of illustrating a subject, a simile may have some effect upon the intellect when it is used to give a hint as to the future developments of the action of the poem. An analysis made after the entire poem has been read will reveal a wisdom of choice in the images used to illustrate early parts of the poem; a foreshadowing of events and clues to the future are discovered in the similes used. This function has been termed prolepsis.

Another intellectual task performed by the simile is that of aggrandizement of the subject or theme. James Whaler makes this function clear in his article, "The Miltonic Simile". He says:

"Simile may ennable the subject by lifting it to sublimity or magnificence, this often in addition to its illustrative function. We may describe the difference between these two functions thus: Where the poet seeks clearness above all, he is likely to content himself with homely images, but where he would ennable, the homely may give place to the unusual, the more familiar to the less
familiar part of his reader's experience or knowledge."

When the poet feels that his subject matter is falling below the standards of nobility demanded by the nature of poetry, or when he feels the need of extraordinary elevation of thought or emotion, he seeks some manner of expression that will raise his theme to the desired heights. A likely instrument is the simile. It enables him to introduce the unusual, the unfamiliar, the revered, the wonderful. We must note here that the task of raising the level of the poet's theme often implies the engendering of noble emotions. Hence, it happens that one simile will fulfill both an intellectual and an emotional function.

Great difficulty is experienced in explaining the human emotions; parallel to this is the difficulty in describing the emotional function of the simile. The most we can say is that the simile has an emotional value of its own, and that it can contribute this value to the object it is seen to illustrate. The emotional value of any given image depends upon the associations, natural or accidental, which cluster about it. As a consequence, the emotion transferred to the primary object may flow naturally and may be quite universal in its appeal; on the other hand, it may be accidental and familiar to only a restricted number of readers. This relation of the image and its emotional atmosphere must be born in mind by the poet when he makes his choice of images.
It would be well to make clear now that we are not concerned directly or primarily with the explicit emotional content of the simile. For example, the feeling of awe that was experienced by Satan as he stood at the steps of heaven and looked down upon the newly created world is made clearer by the apposite picture of a surprised scout, looking from a height upon a dawn-touched city. This primarily an illustrative simile and presents very little difficulty of classification. The type of simile that enters into this discussion of the emotional function is one which concerns the persons of the poet and his auditor rather than the characters of the poem. Father Brown cites the following examples of this type of simile from the *Iliad*:\(^3\) Menelaus' attack on Alexander is likened to the attack of a lion upon a stag; the charge of the Greeks is compared to the rising of storm-clouds from the margin of the sea; the hurried approach of two opposing armies finds a similitude in two mountain torrents rushing to their conourse. It is apparent that there is an emotional halo around each of these images. An exact analysis of this emotional value is impossible; yet we know it is there. Some images have this value as a natural concomitant; others have a value almost wholly dependent upon the experiences of the poet or of the reader. The universal poet chooses that which will strike a response in most of his readers.

The third class of duties ascribed to the simile is
the aesthetic. The simile is generally a picture in its own right; as such it possesses the power to please, to satisfy the poet's and the reader's sense of beauty. Father Brown makes this the chief purpose of Homer's use of the simile.4

In fulfilling the intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic functions, the simile fulfills another purpose, one difficult to classify under the preceding heads,—that of supplying the dramatist's need for relief in narration and in situation. Since the element of plot is essential to the construction of an epic, the epic poet finds himself in many of the dramatist's predicaments. Long descriptions of action and character beget in the reader a desire for variety; intense passions cannot be portrayed for a long period of time without tiring the reader or losing his attention; an unfavorable attitude may be created in the reader by unmitigated description of unpleasant scenes. The artistic touch in such emergencies might well be manifest in the employment of apt similes to suspend action, to divert the reader's mind for the moment from passion-laden lines to scenes of calm and beauty, to convey by contrast with pleasant images the unpleasant matter in hand. Evidently, to classify this function of relief as exclusively intellectual, emotional, or aesthetic would be to confuse its manifold relations.

Having set forth as premises the most important tasks which a poet can lay upon the simile in general, we can make
our subsumptions and see how the epic simile fulfills these
tasks. The function last discussed was that of relief. Surely
the expanded simile is by its very nature the most apt of the
figures of speech for easing the emotional contexts, for
brightening by contrasts a necessarily gloomy picture, or for
bolstering up the flagging interest of the reader in a long,
monotonous description. All this is done by virtue of its
ability to fulfill the other functions of the simile. As a
picture it gives pleasure, and pleasure in a new image is a
relief from the preceding; by its own emotional surroundings
it can relieve and vary the strain of the emotion of its
context; being primarily illustrative, it affords the needed
variety in the narration of action and portrayal of character.

How well does the expanded simile serve as an object
for the aesthetic sense of the poet and the reader? The answer
is that the aesthetic function of the simile in general is most
properly ascribed to the epic simile. In fact, its ability to
please by its own beauty makes the expanded simile in epic
poetry somewhat difficult to manage and to subordinate to the
purpose of the whole. Here true artistry is demanded. Accord-
ing to Father Brown\(^5\), the picture value of the simile is the
secret of the Homeric simile.

"It may be fairly said, with H.V. Routh, that in
the Homeric poems the simile has almost reached
the stage of being a genre of its own, a kind of
poetical inset, an excuse for gratifying the
poet's sense of beauty."
With regard to the emotional value of the epic simile we must not be too enthusiastic, though we do not deny it the ability to impart a certain emotional quality to its primary analogue. The difficulty in ascribing vivid emotional values to this developed type of simile lies in the very extent of its development. The emotions seem to lose its tone in proportion to the length of the simile. Whatever of emotional atmosphere it does retain, it can communicate to its primary analogue.

We come finally to the illustrative function, the most essential of all the intellectual functions, as particularized in the expanded simile. Unusual opportunities are given the poet when he chooses to illuminate his thoughts by means of the developed simile. The hard-to-grasp abstract idea may be embodied in an image almost by way of personification, and the details allowed by the epic simile enable the poet to point out the similitude more exactly. The same may be said when the simile is used to illustrate some relation between persons or things. Concrete objects and visible actions, in their turn, are rendered more vivid for both the intellect and the imagination, and descriptions of them are enlivened by the suggestiveness inherent in the use of similes of the expanded type.

The epic simile has one advantage over other types when we consider the proleptic function; namely, the advantage of exactness of prophetic detail. Undoubtedly, this function calls for much forethought and necessarily limits the number of
similes that may so be used. The length of the simile affords opportunities for prolepsis, but it also demands greater artistry when so employed.

Since aggrandizement of theme is achieved through the grandeur and elevated character of the image contained in the simile, it seems that when this grandeur and elevation can be dwelt on longer and with greater detail, the theme will receive much more of vastness and nobility. To just such a task was the epic simile born.

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Notes to Chapter II


2. Whaler, James, "The Miltonic Simile", PMLA, XLVI (1931), p. 1035

3. Loc. cit.


5. Loc. cit.

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CHAPTER III

The Epic Simile in Paradise Lost

After having discussed the function of the epic simile in a somewhat abstract fashion, we turn our attention to some concrete and practical applications of the various general notions enumerated above. How well did Milton direct his epic similes to their individual ends? What were the results when Milton rendered concrete the theories he pondered in his garden at Horton?

In the beginning of this discussion it might be said that Milton placed greatest emphasis on the intellectual function of the simile. This is in agreement with Father Francis P. Donnelly's position when he distinguishes the Homeric simile from that of subsequent epic poets.¹

"Vergil has much of the historian and the teacher, and Dante gives us a descriptive pageant, and Milton is more concerned to expound, but for Homer the story is the main point, first, last, and always."

This distinguishing seriousness of purpose even in the use of simile can be attributed undoubtedly to Milton's conception of the vocation of the poet and of his own peculiar mission to the people of England. The poet had a gift from on high and a task implied in the bestowal of that gift. In The Reason of Church Government he states his belief quite explicitly:²
These poetic abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility. Teaching over the whole book of sanctity and virtue, through all the instances of example, with such delight to those especially of soft and delicious temper, who will not so much as look upon truth herself, unless they see her elegantly dressed; that whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they will then appear to all men both easy and pleasant, though they were rugged and difficult indeed.

Milton considered himself the chosen seer of the heavenly Spirit, and it is not strange that with such a conception of his place as a poet he would tend to emphasize the expository and the intellectual effectiveness of his similes. In this emphasis, however, Milton does not slight the other potentialities of the simile, nor does he allow the intellectual attitude to destroy the poetic values of the images he employs. The poet is to portray virtue in a delightful way, to dress truth elegantly, and to make the road to a good life both easy and pleasant.

This delightful presentation of truth and virtue is achieved through apt and pleasing illustrations. In the poet we see subordinated to this purpose the illustrative function of the epic simile. The treatment of this primary and essential function of the simile easily resolves itself into three divisions; first, the particular classes of objects to be illustrated by the simile; second, the materials or the sources
from which he drew his illustrations; third, the manner in which Milton proceeded to illustrate these objects. The study of these three heads will place Milton's art of illustration by simile in a clearer light.

As to the first division, three general classes of objects may call upon the poet's imagination for light and clarity in the composition of a poem. We saw in the previous section that these are the realms of the concrete, the abstract, and the mediate one of relationships between persons or things. In order to impress the various characteristics of some sensible, concrete object upon the mind and imagination of his reader, the poet picks out the one detail which serves to summon up an image in some way associated with it. In the first book of *Paradise Lost*, for example, the rustling of the fallen angels' wings brought to mind the time-tried image of buzzing bees, which

"In spring-time, when the Sun with Taurus rides,  
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive  
In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers  
Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed plank  
The suburb of their straw-built citadel,  
New rubbed with balm, expatiate, and confer  
Their state affairs: so thick the aery crowd  
Swarmed and were straitened;......."  
(P.L. I, 768-776)

In another concrete simile we are made to picture the bulk of Satan as he lay on the infernal lake, and then we are aided in our task by the description of the huge sea-beast that swims off Norway's shores and is mistaken for an island by a struggling ship's crew (I, 199-207). Again, the picture of Satan
wringing his way upward through Chaos is illumined by the image of a fleet far off at sea, riding, as it were, in the clouds (II, 636-644). Milton's description of Satan's shield lends a classical touch to his use of similes. Homer and Virgil each gave his hero a shield; Milton imitates them in a small way; he could have gone farther in his imitation and described in detail the shield of his hero. Instead, he calls upon the apt descriptive image of the moon seen through Galileo's glass. He describes Satan with

".....his ponderous shield
Ethereal temper, massy, large, and round,
Behind him cast; the broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
At evening, from the top of Fiesole
Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,
Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe."

(P.L. I, 284-291)

So much for the realm of the strictly concrete. When Milton wished to impress on his reader the exact relation between two persons, the epic simile enabled him to enlarge upon the point or points on which the terms were related and thus to increase the reader's grasp of the situation. For example, the anger and menacing mood of both Satan and his offspring, Death, are rendered more vivid, and some enlightening details of their mutual attitude are suggested by the following simile.

"Each at the head
Levelled his deadly aim; their fatal hands
No second stroke intend, and such a frown
Each cast on the other, as when two black clouds,
With Heaven's artillery fraught, come rattling on
Over the Caspian; they stand front to front
Hovering a space, till winds the signal blow
To join their dark encounter in mid air:
So frown the mighty combatants, that hell
Grew darker at their frown; so matched they stood;..."  
(P.L. II, 711-720)

They are opposed as two livid storm-clouds, each potent, each
defiant and determined. The surrounding atmosphere is as
charged with their wrath as they; another movement and disaster
would be upon them both. Another interesting simile and one
equally effective in clarifying the relation between two persons
is that used to describe the Serpent's assumption of the advo-
cacy of man's cause against the single command of his Creator.
He pretends indignation and

"Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely, and in act
Raised, as of some great matter to begin.
As when of old some orator renowned
In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence
Flourished, since mute, to some great cause addressed,
Stood in himself collected, while each part,
Motion, each act, won audience ere the tongue,
Sometimes in hight began, as no delay
Of preface brooking through his zeal of right:
So standing, moving, or to hight upgrown,
The Tempter......"  
(P.L. IX, 668-678)

Abstract ideas, the third general class of objects,
are not far removed from relationships, and in poetry they
demand some concrete analogy in explanation and development.
The doubt and hesitation which made the fallen angels fear to
move from the surface of the burning lake continued with them
throughout the convocation held in Pandemonium. Finally, with
a plan of action proposed, volunteers were sought to carry it
out. The hellish spirits drooped; no one would take the risk in the face of God's wrath. The sudden change from fear to joy manifested when proud Satan alone volunteered is very well illustrated by another storm scene:

"As when from mountain-tops the dusky clouds Ascending, while the North-wind sleeps, o'erspread Heaven's cheerful face, the louring element Scowls o'er the darkened landscape snow or shower; If chance the radiant sun, with farewell sweet, Extend his evening beam, the fields revive, The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings."

(P.L. II, 488-495)

The illustration of emotions was another task fulfilled by the epic simile. Although some may object that emotions are not exactly abstract ideas, they might be included among the concepts which need to be made more concrete and cannot be so rendered by mere description. Repeatedly in the composition of Paradise Lost Milton used epic similes to illustrate emotions. Among his most beautiful and effective similes are those used to describe Satan's reactions to what he saw on earth. After the hazards and buffetings of the ascent through Chaos up to the scene of God's new creation, Satan must have felt exactly the same surprise and awe

"As when a scout, Through dark and desert ways with peril gone All night, at last by break of cheerful dawn Obtains the brow of some high-climbing hill, Which to his eye discovers unaware The goodly prospect of some foreign land First seen, or some renowned metropolis With glistening spires and pinnacles adorned, Which now the rising sun gilds with his beams:..."

(P.L. III, 543-551)
Again, in the Garden of Eden Satan beheld the beauty and peace which possessed the place and its inhabitants. The effect was such that all

"...over-awed
His malice, and with rapine sweet bereaved
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought.
That space the Evil One abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remained
Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed,
Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge;...

(P.L. IX, 460-466)

Milton intensifies our insight into this mood of Satan by a pleasing rural-life simile, in which a city-bred man breathes the keen air and revels in the attractions of the country-side. Another example of this illustration of the emotion of Satan is that given in Book IV, lines 159 to 165. We get a clearer idea, too, of Death's horrible hunger for his victims by the comparison Milton makes with a flock of ravenous fowl,

"...though many a league remote,
Against the day of battle, to a field,
Where armies lie encamped, come flying, lured
With scent of living carcasses designed
For death the following day in bloody fight;
So scented the grim Feature, and upturned
His nostrils wide into the murky air,
Sagacious of his quarry from so far."

(P.L. X, 273-281)

Milton did not falter in illustrating any class of objects because his store of images was almost boundless. We ask now, whence came this plenitude? A true poet does not pirate his similes bodily from the work of others, but draws them from his own experience, whether first-hand or derived.

In common with all poets, Milton drew on his first-hand
experience of nature's daily workings, treasured in his mind through keen observation. Witness the rural-picture similes and the great storm and cloud similes. It is true, however, that Milton did not use the images of more common life in his similes, as did Homer; the nature of his subject scarcely allowed this. He seems to have chosen the less familiar, the striking scene for his illustrations. We find his sea travels reflected in a number of excellent similes; second-hand experience or poetic invention could hardly give the vividness remarkable in these scenes. For example, notice the effectiveness of the image used to illustrate Satan's departure through Chaos to the earth,

"As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
Close sailing from Bengala,........"

(P.L. II, 636-638)

Or again, when Satan approaches Eve in the Garden,

"......with tract oblique
At first, as one who sought access but feared
To interrupt, sidelong he works his way.
As when a ship, by skilful steersman wrought
Nigh river's mouth or foreland, where the wind
Vears oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail:"

(P.L. IX, 510-515)

Milton's travels in Italy find at least one direct reflection in his similes; namely, in the description of the prostrate forms of the fallen angels,

"......who entranced
Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks
In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades
High over-arched embower;......"

(P.L. I, 301-304)
The accuracy of this reference to the leaf-strewn brooks of Vallombrosa has been questioned because of the fact that the brooks are said to be lined with evergreens. Milton has been vindicated, however, and the exact fact is that the approach to a monastery visited by Milton is made through forests of beech and chestnut. Again, in his *Areopagitica* he states that he visited Florence and Florence's great Galileo, whose work gave Milton material for two similes. The first, employed in describing Satan's shield, has been quoted above; the second, from Book Five, lines 261 to 263, gives us through Galileo's optic glass Raphael's vision of the world he has been commanded to visit. Besides these quite clear references to his travels in Italy, Verity suggests that the scout simile is a relation of the thrill experienced by Milton on first seeing Florence or Rome. This is plausible, since the image is so exactly presented that a personal experience seems to be the only sufficient explanation.

The above experiences are more or less ordinary ones for an educated Englishman. There are, however, several sources of imagery which are not the common possession of poets, but over which Milton by way of hard work and careful study gained complete control. These are, in particular, a fund of classical learning and an intimate acquaintance with the Bible, especially with the Old Testament. If one were to judge Milton's poetry by the number of classical and biblical al-
lusions contained in his epic similes alone, he might come to the conclusion made by Joseph Addison in his critique of Paradise Lost:5

"A third fault in his sentiments is an unnecessary ostentation of learning, which likewise occurs very frequently. It is certain that both Homer and Virgil were masters of all the learning of their times, but it shows itself in their works, after an indirect and concealed manner. Milton seems ambitious of letting us know, by his excursions on free-will and predestination, and by his many glances upon history, astronomy, geography, and the like, as well as by the terms and phrases he sometimes makes us of, that he was acquainted with the whole circle of arts and sciences."

We must note that Addison says that Milton seems to want to display his knowledge, as though he would admit of another explanation of this ostentation. If we consider the character of Milton,—studious, self-contained, retiring, and even timid in certain ways,—and his conviction of his poetic destiny, we may not only succeed in excusing him but even come to see a greater wealth of imagery and poetic effectiveness in his numerous learned references. Young Milton took poetry as a serious profession and felt obliged to prepare himself for his work. In The Reason of Church Government, cited above, he says,6

"Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapors of wine; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite; nor to be obtained by the invocation of dame memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can
enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs; till which in some measure be compassed, at mine own peril and cost, I refuse not to sustain this expectation from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them."

In the seventh of his *Prolusions*, "an oration delivered in the chapel in defense of knowledge", Milton declares that his hesitancy in speaking comes from his belief "that in the orator as in the poet nothing commonplace or mediocre can be allowed, and that he who wishes deservedly to be and to be considered an orator ought to be equipped and perfected with a certain encompassing support of all the arts and all science. Since my age does not permit this, I have preferred up to the present, while providing myself with these supports, to strive earnestly after that true reputation by long and severe toil, rather than to snatch a false reputation by a hurried and pre-mature mode of expression." 7 This preparation for an immortality of fame included, of course, his university training. At Horton, he says, he enjoyed an interval of uninterrupted leisure, which he entirely devoted to the perusal of Greek and Latin authors. 8

From his tractate on education and from his nephew's account of his astounding tutoring program, we can gather some suggestion of the extent of Milton's learning. Such a wealth of erudition and comprehensive knowledge could not but have an influence on
the images Milton chose to illuminate his themes. We are now concerned with this learning chiefly as a source of illustrative material for his epic similes.

Heading the list of his classical readings come the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Homer surely was familiar to Milton, and his influence can be seen in several expanded similes. Milton quite freely imitates Homer's bee simile. Again, when Milton tells of the angel host closing in on Satan with ported spears, we find him using a simile much like that in the *Iliad*, Book II, lines 147-149. Thus Milton:

"While thus he spake, the angelic squadron bright
Turned fiery red, sharpening in mooned horns
Their phalanx, and began to hem him round
With ported spears, as thick as when a field
Of Ceres ripe for harvest waving bends
Her bearded grove of ears which way the wind
Sways them; the careful ploughman doubting stands
Lest on the threshing-floor his hopeful sheaves
Prove chaff."

(P.L. IV, 977-985)

Thus Homer:

"And even as when the West Wind at its coming
Stirreth a deep cornfield with its violent blast,
And the ears bow thereunder, even so was all their gathering stirred,...."

The touch of Homer is felt again where we read that cherubim, descending from heaven to expel Adam and Eve from the Garden, alight,

"....on the ground
Gliding meteorous, as evening mist
Risen from a river o'er the marish glides,
And gathers ground fast at the labourer's heel
Homeward returning."

(P.L. XII, 628-632)
For, in the *Iliad*, Thetis came speedily forth from the gray sea like a mist, and sat her down before the face of Poseidon to plead Achilles' cause. 11

Another Greek author with whom Milton must have been acquainted was Herodotus, the fabulous historian. Evidence of this is had in the gryphon simile used to illustrate Satan's strenuous struggle through the regions of Chaos.

"...nigh foundered, on he fares,
Treading the crude consistence, half on foot,
Half flying; behooves him now both oar and sail.
As when a gryphon through the wilderness
With winged course, o'er hill or moory dale,
Pursues the Arimaspian, who by stealth
Had from his wakeful custody purloined
The guarded gold: so eagerly the Fiend
O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
With head, hands, wings, or feet, pursues his way,..."

(P.L. II, 940-949)

Herodotus in several places in his history mentions the gold-hoarding gryphons and their purloining neighbors, the Arimaspian. 12 The story of Xerxes and his bridge of boats, told in the seventh book of the history of Herodotus, is embodied in detail by Milton in a simile describing the causeway built by Sin and Death to connect the world with Hell:

"...a bridge
Of length prodigious, joining to the wall
Immovable of this now fenceless World,
Forfeit to Death; from a hence a passage broad,
Smooth, easy, inoffensive, down to Hell.
So, if great things to small may be compared,
Xerxes, the liberty of Greece to yoke,
From Susa, his Memnonian palace high,
Came to the sea, and, over Hellespont
Bridging his way, Europe to Asia joined,
And scourged with many a stroke the indignant waves."

(P.L. X, 301-311)
This same story of Xerxes is given by Pliny in his seventh book of his Natural History. This work also contains an account of the fig-tree which was elaborated by Milton in his story of the shame consequent upon the sin of our first parents.\footnote{13} It is probable, however, that Milton drew his account directly from a popular book on botany published by Gerard in 1597.

Passing from the list of Milton's Greek studies to that of the Latin classics, we perceive that his debt to Virgil, as far as the material for epic similes is concerned, is similar to that he owes to Homer. The bee simile in Paradise Lost seems to contain the details of the simile as it occurs in both Homer and Virgil.\footnote{14} Virgil used the figure of autumn leaves to describe the multitude of souls on the banks of the Styx;\footnote{15} Milton used the same figure to describe the number of fallen angels upon the lake of fire. The devastation of the vicinity of Mount Aetna is described in much the same language in both the Aeneid and Paradise Lost. The shores of the lake of fire on which the fallen host lay,

"...such appeared in hue, as when the force
Of subterranean wind transports a hill
Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side
Of thundering Aetna, whose combustible
And Fuelled entrails thence conceiving fire,
Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
And leave a singed bottom all involved
With stench and smoke:"

(P.L. I, 230-237)

Milton seems to have recalled the parallel Virgil drew between the roar of winds through a forest and the murmuring of the gods
who had been stirred by Juno's speech.17

"Thus pleaded Juno, and all the celestial company murmured assent in diverse wise: even as when rising blasts, caught in the forest, murmur, and roll their dull moanings, betraying to the sailors the oncoming gale."

In the second book of Paradise Lost we find, as it were, the aftermath of the storm:

"He scarce had finished, when such murmur filled The assembly, as when hollow rocks retain The sound of blustering winds, which all night long Had roused the sea, now with hoarse cadence lull Seafaring men o'erwatched, whose bark by chance, Or pinnace, anchors in a craggy bay After the tempest: such applause was heard As Ma mmon ended, and his sentence pleased, Advising peace;..."

(P.L. II, 284-293)

One more classical Latin author finds a reflection in the similes of Paradise Lost. This is Lucan, who mentions the fact that prior to the battle of Pharsalia, vultures hovered over the Roman camps.18 Milton likes this figure and uses it to illustrate the delight that Death takes in the sin of Adam and Eve and in its consequences.

"......with delight he smuffed the smell Of mortal change on Earth. As when a flock Of ravenous fowl, though many a league remote, Against the day of battle, to a field, Where armies lie encamped, come flying, lured With scent of living carcasses designed For death the following day in bloody fight;"

(P.L. X, 272-278)

When we turn to the traces of Hebrew culture in Milton's similes, we must remember that they are the mere external signs of a profound internal devotion to the language,
literature, and customs of the Hebrew nation. Milton knew the scriptural languages and delved deeply into its remains, strange and familiar. We find the books of the Old Testament represented in the epic similes of *Paradise Lost* more frequently than any other work: Genesis, Kings, Tobias, Job. The stairs of Jacob's dream \(^{19}\) help to picture the stairs up which Satan longed to climb. That same vision of Jacob lends its light to illustrate the scene of angels alighting on a mount near Paradise, a host

"Not that more glorious, when the Angels met Jacob in Mahanaim, where he saw The field pavilioned with his guardians bright;..."  
(P.L. XI, 213-215)  

In a series of similes which Milton uses to describe the multitude of fallen angels rising from the infernal lake, there is the locust simile, based on a passage from the Book of Exodus, Chapter X, verses 12 to 15. From Exodus, too, another of the same series of similes is taken. By a process of facile association, Milton's mind passes from sedge scattered on a wind-vexed Red Sea coast to the familiar story of Pharoah and the children of Israel. In the Fourth Book of Kings we find written:

"And Eliseus prayed, and said: Lord, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses, and chariots of fire round about Eliseus."  

\(^{20}\)  

Milton uses this vision thus:
"...the Heavenly bands
Down from a sky of jasper lighted now
In Paradise, and on a hill made halt;
A glorious apparition, had not doubt
And carnal fear that day dimmed Adam's eye.
Not that more glorious, when the Angels met
Jacob in Mahanaim, where he saw
The field pavilioned with his guardians bright;
Nor that which on the flaming mount appeared
In Dothan, covered with a camp of fire,
Against the Syrian king, who to surprise
One man, assassin-like, had levied war,
War unproclaimed."

(P. L. XI, 208-220)

The story of young Tobias and his courtship of Sara, as related in the eighth chapter of Tobias, was the ultimate source of a simile used to illustrate by contrast Satan's delight with the odors brought by the breezes from Eden.

"So entertained those odorous sweets the Fiend
Who came their bane, though with them better pleased
Than Asmodeus with the fishy fume
That drove him, though enamoured, from the spouse
Of Tobit's son, and with a vengeance sent
From Media post to Egypt, there fast bound."

(P.L. IV, 166-171)

Some of Milton's epic similes are drawn from several sources. For example, the first epic simile in Paradise Lost, the leviathan simile, is drawn from two sources: a few details are taken from the Book of Job, chapter 41, while a more modern but somewhat indefinite source can be found for the full development of the figure into a sort of sea story. Verity cites Todd as having found a story of this kind in the History of the Northern Nations of Olaus Magnus, a Swedish writer. This work had been translated into English in the year 1658, and so
Milton may have read it. This Swedish author is cited by Robert Burton in his Anatomy of Melancholy, with which, as is quite clear, Milton was well acquainted.

Milton's indebtedness to Burton has been recognized with regard to "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso". A definite dependence in the case of Paradise Lost can also be pointed out when we consider Milton's epic similes, especially those which deal with fairies, witches, or evil spirits. On comparing these similes with the "digression of spirits" found in the Anatomy, one can see how Milton used this dissertation as a point of departure. In the simile mentioned above as taken from the Book of Tobias we find the name Asmodeus, which name, however, does not occur in the related scriptural text, but is given by Burton to the prince of the fourth rank of evil spirits, the "malicious revenging Devils."

In this same digression we find that "some put our fairies into this rank of terrestrial devils ... These are they that dance on heaths and greens, as Lavater thinks with Tritemius, and Olaus Magnus adds, leave that green circle, which we commonly find in plain fields,..." In a footnote we find these details:

"Sometimes they seduce too simple men into their mountain retreats, where they exhibit wonderful sights to their marvelling eyes, and astonish their ears by the sound of bells, &c." 25

Milton must have recalled these passages when he described the hosts of Satan shrinking in size, into narrow room thronging
numberless,

".....like that Pygmean race
   Beyond the Indian mount, or faery elves,
   Whose midnight revels, by a forest-side
   Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
   Or dreams he sees, while overhead the moon
   Sits arbitress, and nearer to the Earth
   Wheels her pale course; they, on their mirth and dance
   Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
   At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds."

(P.L. I, 780-788)

Another occasion on which Milton was influenced by Burton is seen in the will-o'-the-wisp simile, in which Satan is likened to a wandering fire which misleads the night-traveler to bogs and mires. Burton has a discussion of fiery spirits or devils which "work by blazing stars, fire-drakes, or ignes fatui." He adds, quoting from Bodine, that they "lead men often in flumina aut praecipitia." 26 Burton makes a further division of devils, the aerial spirits, who among other tasks, "counterfeit armies in the air" as is illustrated by "Josephus in his book de bello Judaico, before the destruction of Jerusalem." 27 It seems that Milton traced this reference to Josephus and found there:

"Besides these, a few days after the month of Artemisius, a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared: I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals: for, before sun-setting chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities." 28

In Paradise Lost, then, we find this simile, illustrating the games indulged in by the fallen angels as they await Satan's
"As when, to warn proud cities, war appears
Waged in the troubled sky, and armies rush
To battle in the clouds; before each van
Prick forth the aery knights, and couch their spears,
Till thickest legions close; with feats of arms
From either end of Heav en the welkin burns."

(P. L. II, 5333-538)

Milton seems to have taken some note, too, of Burton's several references to Lapland witches who "fly in the air and meet where they will" and "steal young children out of their cradles." The simile of the night hag, "lured with smell of infant blood, to dance with Lapland witches," may, however, owe its origin more directly to Ben Jonson's "Masque of Queens" or to Shakespeare's "Macbeth" or "Comedy of Errors." Jonson's "Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists" is the probable source of a simile satirizing the efforts the alchemists made to compose a stone which would turn all to gold. Describing the marvelous wealth of the orb of the sun:

"Not all parts like, but all alike informed
With radiant light, as glowing iron with fire.
If metal, part seemed gold, part silver clear;
If stone, carbuncle most or chrysolite,
Ruby or topaz, to the twelve that shon
In Aaron's breast-plate, and a stone besides,
Imagined rather oft than elsewhere seen—
That stone, or like to that, which here below
Philosophers in vain so long have sought;
In vain, though by their powerful art they bind
Volatile Hermes, and call up unbound
In various shapes old Proteus from the sea,
Drained through a limbec to his native form."

(P. L. III, 593-605)

Such is the influence had on Milton's use of the epic simile by his profound literary studies. Lest such a list of
borrowings affect our appreciation of Milton's incorporation of them into *Paradise Lost*, we must recall that, on the one hand, his tremendous capacity for learning kept him from petty theft, and, on the other, his superior poetic gift turned all of his learning to advantage and enrichment.

Before turning from the discussion of the illustrative function of the Miltonic expanded simile, we might note two characteristics of the manner or method employed in the construction of the simile. Whaler points out\(^29\) that the chief difference between the simile in Homer and in Milton lies in the high degree of homologation in the latter as contrasted with the usual heterogeneity of detail in the former. Milton strove to maintain a correspondence of detail between the primary and secondary analogue. This tended to shorten the simile and restrict him to a chosen few, but added much to the effectiveness of the simile in its illustrative function. Homer's expanded simile in general takes on the nature of a short story, an episode for the relief of his listeners. This difference forbids the strict application of the term "Homeric simile" to Milton's expanded simile.

The second characteristic of Milton's use of the simile is a tendency to employ several successive similes to illustrate successive stages or points of view in an action or scene. For example, when he desires to impress on his readers the picture of the fallen angels strewn over the surface of the
burning lake, he gives us in two successive similes the leaves of Vallombrosa and the sedge of the Red Sea coast. When he would picture them rising from the lake, he says that they spring up

"Upon the wing, as when men wont to watch
On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread,
Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake."

(P.L. I, 331-334)

A few lines later he adds the locust simile to color his picture of their black, waving multitude in the air, and then pictures them landing in hordes

"......like which the populous North
Poured never from her frozen loins, to pass
Rhene or the Danaw, when her barbarous sons
Came like a deluge on the South, and spread
Beneath Gibraltar to the Libyan sands."

(P.L. I, 351-355)

Other examples may be found in Book II, lines 660-666 and lines 1013-1020. Quite often Milton uses one simile to illustrate an object positively, then adds another which does so negatively. For example, the odors that reach Satan's nostrils are as pleasing as those that blow from the spicy shore of Araby the blest, but not as those fishy fumes that drove Asmodeus from Tobias' spouse.

Another intellectual function closely akin to that of illustration is that of prolepsis. Because of the high degree of homologation in the details of a simile, Milton was able to use his similes to convey to his reader an inkling of future events in the fable. The maintenance of exact parallel in
details led naturally to a selection of such images as would most fully illustrate the primary analogue. One or two examples of this technique may be given. Satan is compared to

"......that sea-beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream.
Him, haply, slumbering on the Norway foam,
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff
Deeming an island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind,
Moors by his side under the lee, while night
Invests the sea, and wished morn delays."

(P.L. I, 199-207)

Our first parents would place their trust in Satan, and, of course, he would prove a treacherous island and carry them into the sea of sin. In the fourth book, Eve is said to be more lovely than Pandora,

"......whom the gods
Endowed with all their gifts; and, O! too like
In sad event, when, to the unwiser son
Of Japhet brought by Hermes, she ensnared
Mankind with her fair looks, to be avenged
On him who had stole Jove's authentic fire."

(P. L. IV, 714-719)

Milton himself points out the proleptic note in this simile.

A third and final example is found in the ninth book where gullible Eve is led on to her downfall by Satan, whom

"......hope elevates, and joy
Brightens his crest. As when a wandering fire,
Compact of unctuous vapour, which the night
Condenses, and the cold environs round,
Kindled through agitation to a flame
(Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends),
Hovering and blazing with delusive light,
Misleads the amazed night-wanderer from his way
To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool,
There swallowed up and lost, from succour far:"
And Milton makes the moral of his choice explicit:

"So glistered the dire Snake, and into fraud
Led Eve, our credulous mother, to the Tree
Of prohibition, root of all our woe;......"

(P.L. IX, 633-645)

Whaler points out the fact that Milton was the first of the epic poets to use proleptic similes in such numbers and with such success.30

A function which belongs to both the intellectual and emotional spheres is that of aggrandizement. James Whaler describes this function as that which ennobles the subject by lifting it to sublimity or magnificence.31 Its place in the epic scheme of Milton's Paradise Lost can be perceived by an enumeration of the number of similes which occur in the various books and a comparison of the content of those books which have many similes with those which have comparatively few. Whaler sums up such a study thus:32

"The comparative absence of simile in Books V, VI, VII, VIII, and XII is the result of the nature of the fable and of Milton's way of narrating 'things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.'"

When Milton began his epic by narrating the doings of Satan and his hosts in Hell, he was on an objectively lower plane of conception than when he ascended with his muse to tell of Paradise and of Heaven. In order, then, to achieve and maintain a balance of grandeur, Milton was obliged to call on his imaginative powers for aid. This need for an aggrandizing element explains in part Milton's predilection for the unusual
image, that which would strike wonder and a sense of greatness in the reader. This is the reason for a leviathan, a Briareos, a Typhon. The majesty and power of an erupting Aetna are added to the description of the soil of Hell; the power and elevation of Galileo's moon help along the straining words of a direct picturing of Satan's shield. Nearly every simile in the first three books of *Paradise Lost* adds a master's touch of color and force to the object described. Milton often counted on the prestige of classical lore as a means of enriching and ennobling his descriptions. On this basis we have the Argonauts, Scylla and Charybdis, Pandora, Odysseus. Similarly, stories from the Old Testament shed their revered light upon scenes which were of themselves difficult to render poetically.

When Satan departed for the new world, there was still a call for ennobling figures of speech. We are presented then with the expansive simile of a fleet of traders afar off, hanging in the clouds. An ennobling note is added to the scene of Satan's encounter with Death by the picture of storm-clouds in head-on collision. With the transfer of the story to Paradise, the need for aggrandizement is lessened; God's newest creation is enough, and the perfection of the inhabitants of Eden carries the subject to the desired heights of poetry. However, the nearer sin comes to ruining this perfection, and baseness enters Paradise, Milton feels called upon again to enoble his theme. We have, then, an increase in the number of similes
when Satan sets about his work of spoliation. Very soon after the sin of Adam and Eve, the poet uses an epic simile, a sign, as it were, of his sorrow and of the fall of ideal conditions in Paradise; for, preceding this fall, through the long conversa-
tion of Raphael with Adam, he had used no such extended figures. He would raise the tone of his theme by the simile of the Malabar fig tree, or by comparing the naked shame of our first parents with the state of the nations seen by Columbus:

"Such of late
Columbus found the American so girt
With feathered cincture, naked else and wild
Among the trees on isles and woody shores."
(IX, 1115-1118)

The closing books of Paradise Lost have often been rightly criticized as unpoetical, and the reason given is that Milton adhered too strictly to the text of the Bible. Had he given his genius freer rein (and his genius was shown in his use of expanded similes for the purpose of aggrandizement), the results would have been more satisfactory to the reader. The theme was not always noble in itself and needed the full power of Milton's poetic inspiration to raise it to the level of the earlier parts of the work. Much of this elevation of theme could have been achieved through the aggrandizing function of the epic simile.

The effect of aggrandizement through simile is both intellectual and emotional, because the writer's efforts to render stubborn subjects more poetical imply a clarification
and illustration of the subject and a transfer of some sort of emotional value from the secondary to the primary analogue.

In treating of the emotional function of the Miltonic simile we shall merely examine certain similes which are considered to have some emotional value besides that which may be directly expressed. This value may serve to accentuate the emotional atmosphere of a scene either by similarity or by contrast. Notice, for example, the pleasure associated with the cool autumnal scene,

"In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades
High over-arched embower:"

Then take that scene in its context:

"......and the torrid clime
Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with fire.
Nathless he so endured, till on the beach
Of that inflamed sea he stood, and called
His legions,......"

(I, 297-301)

As an example of an emotional contribution through similarity of atmosphere, we might quote the locust simile. The poet wished to strike in his reader the emotions of awe and fear at the hovering of myriad fallen angels over the infernal lake,

"As when the potent rod
Of Amram's son, in Egypt's evil day,
Waved round the coast, up called a pitchy cloud
Of locusts, warping on the eastern wind,
That o'er the realm of impious Pharaoh hung
Like night, and darkened all the land of Nile:"

(I, 338-343)

The chatter of locusts rises in pitch as they sweep down a valley and fills the inhabitants with terror and despair; so,
too, the reader at the sight of the infernal spirits hovering as thick as locusts. The simile which immediately follows the picture of the locusts is an example of accentuation by contrast. (Confer Book I, 351-355.). Later on in Book I Milton calls upon a solar eclipse to contribute its atmosphere of mystery and strangeness to the description of Satan's faded glory.

"He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower; his form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new-risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon,
In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes monarchs."

(I, 589-599)

The same accentuation and clarification of emotion is had when Death is made to appear more terrible than

"Vexed Scylla, bathing in the sea that parts Calabria from the hoarse Trinacrian shore;
Nor uglier follow the night-hag, when, called In secret, riding through the air she comes,
Lured with smell of infant blood, to dance With Lapland witches, while the labouring moon Eclipses at their charms."

(II, 659-666)

The vulture on Imaus bred, the prowling wolf, the thief—all have a somewhat similar effect upon the reader. When Ithuriel with his heaven-tempered spear touches Satan, who is crouched in the form of a toad at the ear of sleeping Eve, Satan starts up in his own shape. The reader is enabled to feel Ithuriel's surprise by the image of a flash of light,
"As when a spark
Lights on a heap of nitrous powder, laid
Fit for the tun, some magazine to store
Against a rumoured war, the smutty grain,
With sudden blaze diffused, inflames the air:"

(IV, 814-818)

The least important function of the epic simile in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the aesthetic function. The value of the similes as pictures, as excuses for gratifying the poet's sense of beauty, is subordinated entirely to the more serious tasks of illustration, prolepsis, aggrandizement, and emotional enrichment. There are, however, several beautiful pictures among the many that Milton drew. Mount Aetna, belching smoke and fired minerals and wreaking havoc on the surrounding forests, would make a powerful picture. A romantic artist might readily choose the Etrurian shades in Vallombrosa for his subject; while a religious-minded master might work on the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. A beautiful scene is contained in the fine fairy simile used to describe Satan's hosts. Perhaps a Turner would succeed in rendering in oils the following landscape:

"As when from mountain tops the dusky clouds
Ascending, while the North-wind sleeps, o'erspread
Heaven's cheerful face, the louring element
Scowls o'er the darkened landskip snow or shower;
If chance the radiant sun with farewell sweet
Extend his evening beam, the fields revive,
The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds
Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings."

(II, 488-495)

Other pictures of note would be had in the fleet of traders seen at a distance against the clouds, the scout overlooking the
strange city, the rural scene visited by a city-dweller, and the Malabar fig-tree, haunt of shepherds shunning the heat.

The pleasure which is experienced when these pictures are presented serves, as was the case with the work of Homer, as a relief from unpleasant or uninteresting description or narration. The function of relief is dependent, then, upon the other functions of the simile for its effectiveness. According to Whaler, Milton seldom used a simile for this purpose. One good example, however, was cited above; Milton turns our minds from the shame and sin of Adam and Eve to the elaborate picture of the fig-tree. As a relief from the confined atmosphere of the infernal regions, Milton gives us the bee simile, and speaks of spring and fresh dews and flowers. Milton becomes Homeric when he uses the wheat-field simile to relieve the tense atmosphere of the scene when

"......the angelic squadron bright
Turned fiery red, sharpening in mooned horns
Their phalanx, and began to hem him round
With ported spears,......"

(IV, 977-980)

Homer lightened his descriptions of battles by many similes, but Milton considered himself exempt from this epic necessity because of the nature of his tale. He turned his simile talent more to illustration and less to the dramatic purpose of relief.
Notes on Chapter III

6. As quoted by Hanford, op. cit., page 320.
7. The Student's Milton, page 1120. (Edited by F. A. Patterson)
10. Iliad, II, 147-149.
11. Iliad, I, 359.
13. Pliny, Natural History, Book XII, 5.
17. Aeneid, X, 96-99 (Loeb Translation).
32. Whaler, James, "The Compounding and Distribution of Simile in *Paradise Lost*", *MP*, XXVIII (1931), page 324.
33. Whaler, op. cit. page 1036.
CHAPTER IV

The Epic Simile and Milton's Style

All writers agree that Milton's works, especially his Paradise Lost, are characterized by a style peculiarly their own. The study we have made of Milton's use of the epic simile leads us to the fact that the epic simile has played an important part in winning for Milton the distinction of a style all his own—the Miltonic style.

Our notions of style in general may be clarified by a comparison. A sculptor's work consists in five things; namely, his medium, his tools, a certain manner in the use of these tools, an idea to express, and a model to follow in expressing it. A writer must have a medium and tools to work in this medium; these he finds in language, words in their various combinations of thought and sound values. Among these combinations we place the epic simile and all other rhetorical and poetical devices, all to be wrought into shape by the skill, the individualized skill of the writer, by his style.

Style, then, is the personalized manner in which a writer handles the elements of language. Arlo Bates in his Talks on Writing English analyzes style.

"The term style is commonly used rather indefinitely to indicate either technical finish or the more subtle qualities of literary expression."

He says again,

"If we understand it to mean merely correctness or even
elegance of language, the proper proportion of different parts of a composition, the accurate choice of words and the judicious employment of figures and of ornaments,.."

we may term it technical finish. This element of style is communicable and enters into the success of all great writers. Hence it is not precisely of technical finish that we speak when we mention the Miltonic style, but of "the more subtle qualities of literary expression" to be found in Milton's works, particularly in his *Paradise Lost*.

When we consider the epic simile as affecting Milton's style, we understand the simile in both a general and a particular sense. Generally speaking, we say that the epic simile is a rhetorical device calculated to serve certain purposes, as was explained above. Thus understood it remains a mere instrument in the hands of the poet and can hardly be said to affect style in the sense of "the more subtle qualities of literary expression."

To my mind, however, any particular simile does have some connection with the intangible elements of style. Each given simile is an instrument, it is true, but an instrument wrought for an individual need, to convey a definite impression, to lend a crowning touch of color or emotion, all the while remaining an attraction in itself. With such an instrument there is necessarily some intimate connection with the personality of the poet; and personality is the force that stamps a writer's style with individuality.
One outstanding characteristic in the personality of Milton was his aloofness from ordinary men. This was displayed even in his early years at Cambridge, where he lived a studious and retired life. His sincere conviction of his calling as a poet furthered this withdrawal from the ordinary pastimes of his associates. Meanwhile, he strove hard to prepare himself for his sacred tasks, poring over tomes of the ancients, both classical and biblical, devouring contemporary and recent literary productions.

Naturally enough this severe discipline made itself felt in his poetic style, and it is especially evident in his later works, in which his inspiration was more straitened than before. Even in his poetry,—in diction, form, construction—he was separated from ordinary men. This conscious desire to remain aloof manifested itself in several ways, all of which have been numbered among the peculiarities of the Miltonic style.

The first of these peculiarities of style is the profound learning, which reached out in every direction, into every sphere—science, nature, mythology, classical and biblical lore, theology. However, this characteristic itself takes various forms. Some commentators term it intellectuality, since it presupposes a love of learning on the part of both author and reader. Others call it allusiveness, since many of its manifestations are brief but rich in suggestion, summoning up to the initiated mind a wealth of related detail. The majesty and
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dignity, too, of Milton's style have some roots in his rich vein of learning; the reverence connected with the classics and the Bible and the awe inspired by familiarity with difficult sciences and strange practices combine to produce an effect of distant majesty. I quote from John Clark's *A History of Epic Poetry*:

"Literary power is the power to please, and he who can please not only by his own creation and its proper dress, but, over and above, by a suggestive diction that recalls to our minds the pleasures that are associated with books, times, and places, enhances in a singular way the effect of the result he specially aims at producing. And Milton, who, if anything, was an original genius, was none the less able to recreate by verbal imagery dead delights that are buried in the memory."

The learned Milton embodied much of his classical erudition in epic similes. Examples of his thorough acquaintance with Greek and Latin authors are found in about ten expanded similes. Among these authors we have Homer, Herodatus, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan. Further acquaintance with classical sources is evidenced in the similes based on Greek and Roman mythology. We find the stories of Pandora and Hermes, the pygmies, Almathea and Bacchus, Deucalion and Pyrrha, the Argonauts, the phoenix, and a list of mythical gardens which are compared unfavorably with the garden of Eden.

Devotion to biblical studies impregnated Milton's imagination with images drawn from the sacred texts. There are five fine examples of epic similes which display this devotion to the Bible: the leviathan, the pursuit of the Jews by the Egyptians, the locusts, the stairs of Jacob, and Elisha's
Astronomy seems to have attracted Milton in his studies and to have influenced his poetic style. Besides the complex Ptolemaic system which he employs in the construction of his universe, there is evidence of his astronomical learning in his epic similes. We find the eclipse of the sun, the studies of Galileo and his marvelous glass; we hear of the intricate order of the heavens and again of the possibilities of a war among the planets. Shooting stars and the moon in its earthly orbit also find place in epic similes.

Such is the part played by the epic simile in stamping Milton's style with the mark of profound learning. Another characteristic of this style is founded partly on the effect of this deep learning on the reader. Andrew Marvel first spoke of a distinguishing stateliness of Milton's work in some verses prefixed to the 1674 edition of Paradise Lost:

"That majesty which through thy work doth reign
Draws the devout, deterring the profane."

Milton's theme is noble, his purpose high:

"Of man's first disobedience....
That to the hight of this great argument
I may assert the ways of God to men."

(P.L. I, 1; 24-26)

A responsibility corresponding to the majesty of the theme rested on the poet. He must not let any element in the epic detract from its dignity, and, when on occasion his theme lost some of its dignity, he must seek some means of restoring it.
Milton found in the epic simile an instrument of thought and feeling which bore with it the prestige of ancient classical writers, and hence would in no wise detract from a subject already in itself full of majesty. Further, the epic simile would be an apt means of engendering an atmosphere of dignity and aloofness when the subject matter sank of necessity to a lower plane. This ennobling power of the epic simile was derived in great part from Milton's store of erudition, as well as from an apt choice of images of great magnitude.

Akin to the stateliness and dignity in Milton's style is a certain vastness or expansiveness. In order to convey the proper impression of the magnitude of his drama and the heroic proportions of its actors, Milton chose illustrations that were overwhelming in their effect. Satan was as huge as the greatest beast of the seas. The land on which Satan alights in his flight from the lake of fire is likened to

"......the shattered side
Of thundering Aetna, whose combustible
And fuelled entrails thence conceiving fire,
Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
And leave a singed bottom all involved
With stench and smoke."

(P.L. I, 232-237)

Again, Satan's shield is as large as the moon; his hosts are more numerous than the locusts that "darkened all the land of Nile". The vastness of Satan's flight toward the gates of Hell and beyond is conveyed by the simile of a fleet at sea, which
"hangs in the clouds" far off along the horizon. The sense of hugeness is given to a description of the threatened struggle between Death and Satan by comparing the combatants to two black storm clouds charging upon each other over the Caspian Sea. The noises heard by Satan as he approaches Chaos are made out as tremendous:

"...Nor was his ear less pealed
With noises loud and ruinous (to compare
Great things with small) than when Bellona storms
With all her battering engines bent to rase
Some capital city; or less than if this frame
Of Heaven were falling, and these elements
In mutiny had from her axle torn
The steadfast Earth."

(P.L. II, 920-927)

The battle of the angels in heaven was difficult to portray to the human imagination. The issue was all-important, and the contestants were powerful beings. Certainly the battle must have been of tremendous proportions. To render this clearer to the reader Milton uses epic similes embodying images of tremendous proportions. For example:

"They ended parle, and both addressed for fight
Unspeakable; for who, though with the tongue
Of Angels, can relate, or to what things
Liken on Earth conspicuous, that may lift
Human imagination to such hight
Of godlike power? for likest gods they seemed,
Stood they or moved, in stature, motion, arms,
Fit to decide the empire of great Heaven.
Now waved their fiery swords, and in the air
Made horrid circles; two broad suns their shields
Blazed opposite, while Expectation stood
In horror; from each hand with speed retired,
Where erst was thickest fight, the angelic throng,
And left large field, unsafe within the wind
Of such commotion; such as (to set forth
A poet so given to aloofness, to vastness of concept and magnificence of detail, would hardly be expected to notice the more delicate and familiar beauties of the countryside. Milton's genius, however, did not spurn these, as can be seen from their presence in epic similes. Milton loved nature in her peaceful as well as in her stormy moods. We need only mention a few similes to show that his observation of nature was accurate and sympathetic and his descriptions telling in every picturesque detail. First, the animal similes: the wolf, the "vulture on Imaus bred", the locusts of Egypt, the bees. Plants are represented in such similes as the wheat field, the leaves of Vallombrosa, the Malabar fig tree. The beauty of the storm similes is a reflection of Milton's keen delight in these manifestations of Nature's power. The following picture, I think, is the most striking of all the nature similes in its simple beauty and in the selection of appealing detail. The relief that came to the troubled minds of Satan's legions when he determines to go himself to investigate the new race of mankind is illustrated thus:

"Thus they their doubtful consultations dark
Ended, rejoicing in their matchless Chief:
As when from mountain-tops the dusky clouds
Ascending, while the North-wind sleeps, o'erspread
Heaven's cheerful face, the louring element
Scowls o'er the darkened landscape snow or shower;"
If chance the radiant sun with farewell sweet
Extending his evening beam, the fields revive,
The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds
Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings."

(P. L., II, 486-495)

Other examples of Milton's love of natural beauty have been quoted above under various heads. Noteworthy is the simile of the city-dweller paying a visit to the country. Another occurs when the cherubim are described as

"Gliding meteorous, as an evening mist
Risen from a river o'er the marish glides,
And gathers ground fast at the labourer's heel
Homeward returning."

(P. L., XII, 629-632)

One distinguishing quality of Milton's style in Paradise Lost is its sublimity. For this we may take Addison's word. He states that it is a requisite for an heroic poem that its language be both perspicuous and sublime. With regard to the sublimity of language in Paradise Lost he says:

"Milton....has carried our language to a greater height than any of the English poets have ever done before or after him, and made the sublimity of his style equal to that of his sentiments."

This sublimity or elevation of style is achieved by the choice of words and phrases which bear with them a world of suggestion. Milton's learning, his experience and observation, together with his poet's imagination (all highly personal elements) made his language the loftiest ever wrought. It pleased every element in the make-up of his readers, yet became sublime by remaining ever beyond their complete comprehension, in a manner analogous to that in which the vision of the Godhead will
satisfy the saints, yet never be comprehended by them.

Can we say that the epic simile has part in generating this loftiness? We wish to speak here of particular similes. Yes, there are several that give their touch of sublimity. They present a pleasing picture to the imagination and clarify some point for the intellect; yet they go far beyond these duties with their suggestive power. For one example we may take the simile that appealed strongly to Lord Tennyson:

"Meanwhile the Adversary of God and Man,
Satan, with thoughts inflamed of highest design,
Puts on swift wings, and toward the gates of Hell
Explores his solitary flight; sometimes
He scours the right hand coast, sometimes the left;
Now shaves with level wing the deep, then soars
Up to the fiery concave towering high.
As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
Close sailing from Bengal, or the isles
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring
Their spicy drugs; they on the trading flood,
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape,
Ply stemming nightly toward the pole: so seemed
Far off the flying Fiend."

(P. L., II, 629-643)

Then the scout simile:

"Satan from hence, now on the lower stair
That scaled by steps of gold to Heaven-gate,
Looks down with wonder at the sudden view
Of all this World at once. As when a scout,
Through dark and desert ways with peril gone
All night, at last by break of cheerful dawn
Obtains the brow of some high-climbing hill,
Which to his eye discovers unaware
The goodly prospect of some foreign land
First seen, or some renowned metropolis
With glistening spires and pinnacles adorned,
Which now the rising sun gilds with his beams:"

(P.L., III, 540-551)
Rural scenes always please and carry with them an intangible longing. Milton captures this power of the country when he describes Satan's relief in Eden.

"Much he the place admired, the person more. As one who, long in populous city pent, Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air, Forth issuing on a summer's morn to breathe Among the pleasant villages and farms Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight— The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine, Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound; If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass, What pleasing seemed, for her now pleases more, She most, and in her look sums all delight:"

(P.L., IX, 444-454)

Awe and mystery surround the tales of the Will o' the Wisp. From his store of learning Milton draws the following picture to lead the reader to sense more than he can comprehend.

"Hope elevates, and joy Brightens his crest. As when a wandering fire, Compact of unctuous vapour, which the night Condenses, and the cold environs round, Kindled through agitation to a flame (Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends), Hovering and blazing with delusive light, Misleads the amazed night-wanderer from his way To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool, There swallowed up and lost, from succour far:"

(P.L., IX, 633-642)

In all this discussion of the effect of the epic simile on Milton's style we must remember that style was understood as a thing intangible. The epic simile is an instrument in the hands of the poet, an instrument that has some intangible effect. The personality of the poet will condition his use of that instrument; in other words, his personality will condition his style. Milton's personality
marked his work with profound learning and with majesty. His serious purpose and the consciousness of the enormity of his task made his masterpiece remarkable for its sublimity and the effect of immensity, which it has on its readers. In all this the epic simile had a share.
Notes on Chapter IV


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CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis of the use of the expanded simile in *Paradise Lost* we can conclude with safety that Milton succeeded in making that type of simile an integral part of the whole of his work. Far from employing it as a mere ornament or as a token of his submission to the canons of the epic art, he has put his simile to work. He used the illustrative powers of the epic simile to the fullest extent, and made it the channel for the delivery of much of his store of information and erudition. Milton set the epic simile to the task of foreshadowing future events as well as that of lending grandeur to the theme. Further, the poet perceived the value of the expanded simile in creating a definite emotional atmosphere, and so employed it. Milton's vivid imagination created beautiful pictures; one way he saw of sharing this beauty with his readers was that of the epic simile.

In these various ways, then, Milton proved that his use of the epic simile in *Paradise Lost* was not merely conventional imitation of his predecessors, but a deliberate striving for the highest manner of expression, one element in the production of his masterpiece.

L.D.S.
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The thesis, "Milton's Use of the Epic Simile in Paradise Lost", written by Frank Louis Martinsek, S.J., has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Rev. J. P. Burke, S.J. September 6, 1940
Rev. Burke O'Neill, S.J. August 1, 1939