

Epic Similes

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Simile

- Explicit comparison, often using “like” or “as”
- Reveals unexpected likeness between two seemingly disparate things
- Probably oldest identifiable poetic figure, common in Sumerian, Sanskrit, Greek
- Not just literary embellishment, but tool of thought, way of seeing

Epic Simile

- Most prestigious kind of simile
- Lengthy comparison between two highly complex objects, actions, or relations
- Invention attributed to Homeric poems
 - Creates contrast
 - Establishes digression
 - Amplifies themes
- Later poets make it integral to epic structure and tradition

Example: *Iliad* 6.146-49

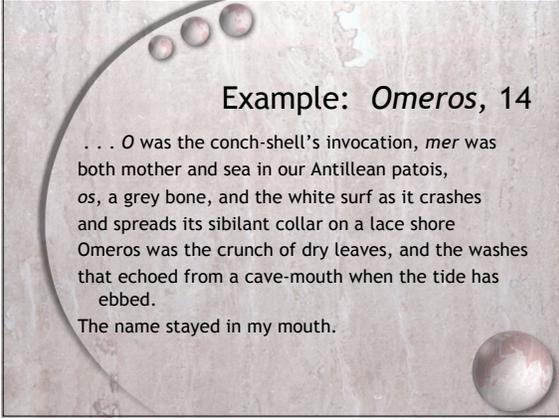
As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity. The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning. So one generation of men will grow while another dies.

Example: *Aeneid* 6.305-310

Here a whole crowd came streaming to the banks . . . as many souls as leaves that yield their hold on boughs and fall through forests in the early frost of autumn . . .

Example: *Paradise Lost* 1.301-303

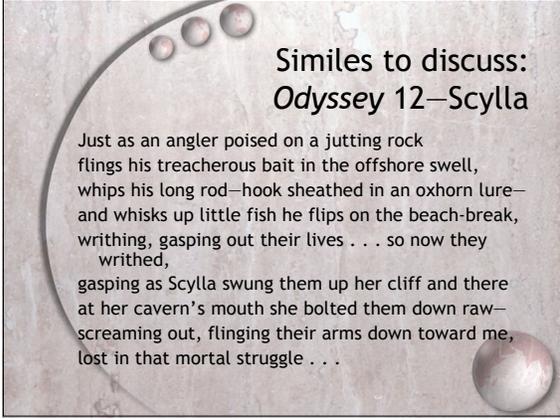
[Lucifer] stood and call'd
His Legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans't
Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the
Brooks
In *Vallombrosa*, where th' *Etrurian* shades
High overarch't imbow'r



Example: *Omeros*, 14

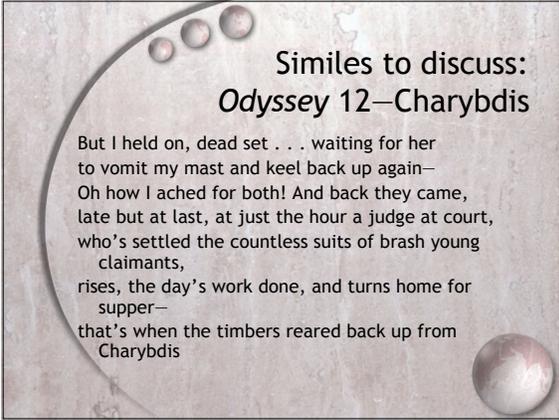
. . . *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was both mother and sea in our Antillean patois, *os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore *Omeros* was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed.

The name stayed in my mouth.



Similes to discuss:
Odyssey 12—*Scylla*

Just as an angler poised on a jutting rock flings his treacherous bait in the offshore swell, whips his long rod—hook sheathed in an oxhorn lure—and whisks up little fish he flips on the beach-break, writhing, gasping out their lives . . . so now they writhed, gasping as *Scylla* swung them up her cliff and there at her cavern's mouth she bolted them down raw—screaming out, flinging their arms down toward me, lost in that mortal struggle . . .



Similes to discuss:
Odyssey 12—*Charybdis*

But I held on, dead set . . . waiting for her to vomit my mast and keel back up again— Oh how I ached for both! And back they came, late but at last, at just the hour a judge at court, who's settled the countless suits of brash young claimants, rises, the day's work done, and turns home for supper— that's when the timbers reared back up from *Charybdis*