

SIMILES IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER:
THEIR ORIGINS AND
STYLISTIC FUNCTIONS

by

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of John Matthews Manly's Warton Lecture to the British Academy, "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians,"¹ considerable effort has been spent in trying to determine whether Chaucer achieved his stature as a writer by means of or in spite of, the medieval rhetorical tradition. Recent studies, as, for example, James Jerome Murphy's doctoral dissertation, Chaucer, Gower, and the English Rhetorical Tradition,² and Robert Payne's The Key of Remembrance,³ include detailed surveys of the post-Manly scholarship dealing with Chaucer's alleged acquaintanceship with rhetorical manuals. Probably the most significant result of all the controversy has been, not merely the recognition that Chaucer probably used rhetoric as Mr. Jourdain used prose, but rather an increased interest in analyzing various aspects of Chaucer's technique, not in the spirit of fragmentation, but in the hope of discovering eventually how such vibrant literature could emerge from an age inheriting such stereotyped theory. As Payne formulates the problem,

1 The Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. 12 (1926), p. 95-113, reprinted in Chaucer Criticism, The Canterbury Tales, ed. Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, Notre Dame University Press, 1960, p. 268 f.

2 Stanford University, 1956, Ann Arbor Microfilm, No. 20460.

3 New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963.

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The real question is not whether Chaucer employs occasional stylistic devices which the rhetoricians happen to have tabulated, but whether whole poems--good or even great poems--can be produced in the aesthetic tradition which the rhetorical manuals represent.⁴

But Chaucer's "good or even great" poetry is a fait accompli. And for over five centuries casual readers and critics have attempted to understand the elements which make up Chaucer's distinctive style. Among the figures of speech which undoubtedly account for it to a great extent is the simile--perhaps the oldest, and in some ways the simplest, of tropes. Yet even at the outset a paradox in Chaucer's use of similes is evident; despite the fact that almost every example of this figure may be found in earlier literature, still it remains forever associated with Chaucer's originality. In the hope of partially resolving this paradox, this study will concentrate upon these areas: 1) which types of simile appear most frequently in Chaucer's works; 2) in what ways Chaucer merely adopts, and in what ways he modifies, the example of his predecessors; 3) which of the ancient or medieval users of simile he most resembles in spirit; 4) whether the frequency of this figure varies according to genre or date of composition; and 5) to what uses decorative or functional, or both, Chaucer employs this figure.

⁴ Payne, Op. Cit., p. 18.

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A number of scholars have already laid a firm foundation for a study of Chaucer's similes. In 1911 Hiram Corson compiled an index of figures of speech in the Canterbury Tales.⁵ Chaucer's proverbs were collected by Willibald Haeckel in Das Sprichwort bei Chaucer,⁶ a tool which has only recently been superseded by Bartlett Whiting's book, Chaucer's Use of Proverbs.⁷ Editors of Chaucer's works have contributed through the centuries by their painstaking scholarship; the notes in W. W. Skeat's Oxford Chaucer are monumental.⁸ In the New Cambridge Edition, F. N. Robinson has made available the best of Skeat as well as the best of twentieth century scholarship.⁹ Sanford B. Keech's Design in Chaucer's Troilus devotes considerable space to the figurative patterns including simile, as well as metaphor, metonymy, and example, in Troilus and Criseyde.¹⁰ Individual articles, which will be noted throughout this study, have demonstrated the contribution of simile to plot and characterization in specific works. It is hoped that by examining the entire collection of Chaucer's similes in the light of these studies, a more

5 Chaucer Society, First Series No. 72, London, 1911.

6 Erlangen, Junge & Sohn, 1890.

7 Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, No. 11, 1934.

8 6 vols. and supplement, Oxford, 1894-7.

9 Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1957.

10 Syracuse University Press, 1959.

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congruent picture of Chaucer's employment of this figure may emerge.

Investigation into the nature of simile presents an initial complexity in regard to the proposed study. It is almost impossible to arrive at a univocal definition of the simile as distinguished from the figure "comparison."

Actually, most authors who have dealt in any way with the problem have admitted defeat and grouped the two figures together, with or without apology. Once a distinction has been recognized, it may immediately be perceived that in Chaucer's work, very few real similes appear. Comparisons abound, however. Thus both similes and comparisons will be examined in order to obtain a more complete picture.

The works of Chaucer will be dealt with in a roughly chronological manner, with the exception of the Canterbury Tales, which will be examined according to genres.

CHAPTER I

DEFINITION OF SIMILE

Students embarking upon a study of imagery generally begin with the simile, which is assumed by the authors of their textbooks to be the most easily identifiable figure of speech and the one most readily defined. However, although it is possible to assign the simile to a definite classification, a greater difficulty arises when one tries to differentiate it from other members of its class. Nor is the difficulty lessened by etymological study; rather the issue becomes increasingly complicated the more it is pursued. Consequently, this initial chapter will be devoted to an examination of the term simile, its definition and the relationship of this term with others which are close in meaning.

Modern dictionaries assume the figurative nature of simile. The following is a definition, typical of those found in collegiate dictionaries:

simile, a figure of speech stating a comparison explicitly, usually with like, as, so, etc., as life is like a stream; distinguished from metaphor (where the likeness is only implied) and from comparison (where it is literal); expressed imaginative comparison.¹

1 Macmillan's Modern Dictionary, New York, Macmillan, 1938.

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Yet when the word simile is examined according to historical principles, a certain complexity presents itself. The New English Dictionary gives as the etymology of the word:

"L. simile, neuter of similis, like," and defines it as "a comparison of one thing with another, especially as an ornament in poetry or rhetoric." The first use of the word discovered in English is from Langland's Piers Plowman (C. xx. 160): "By this simile . . . ich seo an euidence, That ho so synegeb in þe seynt espirit asoilled worth he neuere." This identical quotation, however, is cited under the third definition of the cognate word similitude, which specifically equates the latter word with simile: "a comparison drawn between two things or facts; the expression of such comparison; a simile." In addition to the example from Langland another is excerpted from Chaucer's Second Nun's Tale (431): "Almache answerde vn-to that similitude, 'Of whennes comth thyn answeryng so rude?'" It is difficult to understand in the context where a "similitude" is supposed to exist. Almache has said: "I axe thee though it thee greeve, Of thy religioun and of thy bileeve." (426-27)² Cecilia has answered: "Ye han bigonne your questioun folily,

² F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer Second Edition, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Houghton Mifflin, 1957. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from Chaucer's works will be taken from this edition.

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that wolden two answeres conclude/ In o demande; ye axed lewedly." (429-30) What Chaucer meant by "similitude" in this answer of Almache is a puzzle since the speech of Cecilia appears to be merely a literal criticism of his question.

However, other examples demonstrating the use of the word similitude in the New English Dictionary indicate that both the literal and the **figurative** senses belong to the concept. Wilson, in his Rhetoric (1553), states: "A similitude is a likenesse when two thynges, or mo then two, are so compared and resembled together, that thei bothe in some one propertie seme like." Apparently the two things likened are assumed to be essentially dissimilar. To Addison, the word similitude corresponded exactly to our use of the word simile: "Those who are acquainted with Homer's and Virgil's way of Writing, cannot but be pleased with this kind of Structure in Milton's Similitudes." (Spectator, No. 303)

Yet another definition is given to similitude in the New English Dictionary: "a parable; an allegory. Chiefly in Biblical use, after L. similitudo, used to render Gr. parabole." The earliest example of the word used in this sense is credited to Wyclif: "Luc telleþ how Jesus seide to his disciplis þis similitude: þer was a man þat hadde a fige tree." (Selected Works, II, 207)

By the seventeenth century in England, the words similitude and similie [sic] seem to have been the

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exclusive property of didactic writers, if we may judge from the collections available today. According to Frank J. Wilstach,³ the books of similes of that century are in reality "religious dissertations." The avowed purpose of Robert Cawdray in publishing his Treasurie or store house of similes (1600) included the giving of pleasure as well as edification. In the dedication to Sir John Harington and his brother, Cawdray wrote:

This Booke . . . containeth certain verie pleasant, delightfull, and profitable Similies: that is, when two things or moe then two, are so compared, resembled, and conferred together, that they in some one propertie seeme like: Wherein not onely sundrie, and very many, most horrible and foule vices, and daungerous sinnes of all sorts, are so familiarly, and so plainly laid open, ripped up, and displayed in their kinds, and so pointed at with the finger of God, in his sacred and holy Scriptures, to signifie his wrath and indignation belonging unto them, that such as are Christians in deed, being seasoned and endued with the spirit of grace, and having God before their eyes, will bee verie feareful, even in loue that they beare to God, to pollute and defile their hearts, their minds, their mouthes, or hands, with any such forbidden things . . .⁴

After a long explanation in this vein, Cawdray concludes:

For many times that thing, which cannot bee perceived or vnderstood of Readers of Bookes, and

³ A Dictionary of Similes, New Edition, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1924, p. xii.

⁴ London, Printed by Tho. Creede, dwelling in the Old Chaunge, at the Signe of the Eagle and Childe, near Old Fish-Streete, 1600. (no pagination)

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hearers of Sermons, by a simplé precept, may yet by a Similitude or plaine example, bee attained vnto. So that if any be desirous to compare a thing from the lesse to the greater: Similitudes will helpe him greatly in this behalfe.⁵

As the crowning argument to justify his concern with similes, Cawdray adds:

And that there is a necessarie and profitable vse of Similies, we may easily gather, for that the holy Ghost hath so often used them, both in the old and new Testament, as amongst many, these few quotations doo shew.⁶

And he cites by chapter and verse from the books of Samuel, Judges, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Jeremias, the four Evangelists, and the Epistles of St. Paul. Cawdray shows wide acquaintanceship not only with the Sacred Scriptures but also with the Fathers of the Church, for to justify the use of similes for teaching the word of God, he points to the example of Tertullian, Chrysostom, Origen, Cyprian, Nazianzen, Basil, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine.⁷ Cawdray adds a warning to the reader in regard to the structure of simile:

This also is to be remembered of the Reader, that a Similitude is not the same in euerie particular, as that which was likned vnto it, but it is sufficient if it be like in one. Againe, Similitudes are never set out to confirme or confute, but to adorne, and to make a matter more plaine; and yet is euermore inferiour to the matter in hand.⁸

5 Idem.

6 Idem.

7 Idem.

8 Idem.

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Anthonie Fletcher's collection of Certaine Very Proper, and Most Profitable Similies is even more serious in tone than Cawdray's. In the dedication to Lord Gilbert Taulbut, he states:

I have ventured to take a little pains and collect . . . a little booke of Similies, to testifie my love in Christ Iesu, to all the seruants of God.⁹

The similes are numbered, but apparently not arranged in any specific order. Typical of his similes are comparisons of a physician cutting a vein to relieve suffering, with Christ suffering to heal mankind; of fields visited by rain, with souls nourished by the doctrine of Christ; of a candle unable to light another if its light be extinguished, to a prelate unable to inflame others without the love of God.¹⁰

The following simile is an example taken from a third collection--this one by John Spencer:

A Great Emperour buyeth a Woman that is a slave, which he intends to marry, and will do so, whether she will or no; yet will he woe /sic/ her, and, if possible, marry her Will as well as her Person, yet whether she will or no, he will and may marry her, for she is his purchase; she is his Wife in his determination before he hath married her: This is a Simile, that at the first view may seem to hold out much of God's ability in the working of Man to will and do; yet being put into the ballance will

9 London, Iohn Iackson, for Isaac Bing, 1595.

10 Idem.

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be found light; For though this Emperour hath power to force the Womans body to the action, yet he hath no power to force her will, to be willing to the action: The will is alwayes independent sui juris, but God hath power not only to marry the Soul, which he hath bought from being a slave to the Devill, but to make it ready and willing to marry him.¹¹

At first sight there may seem to be little difference between the foregoing similes, which Wilstach calls "religious dissertations," and the ones cited as modern examples, except that these use natural phenomena to parallel supernatural truths, whereas simile in its usual sense denotes a figure bringing together objects or ideas wholly within the realm of the natural. Structurally the two kinds are alike; even in purpose-- to achieve greater clarity and vividness-- they function in similar ways. Thus the similitudo or simile may mean a literal comparison, a simple figurative comparison, or a Biblical parable or allegory. This overlapping of meaning is further complicated by attempts to translate into French and English the names of figures found in ancient and medieval rhetorics and poetics.

In the Rhetorica ad Herennium,¹² for example, the terms similitudo and imago are used to name two of the figures of diction. The first translates the Greek parabole;

¹¹ Things New and Old. Or, A Store-house of Similies, Sentences, Allegories, Apophthegms, Adagies, Apologues, Divine, Morall, Politicall, etc. . . London, Wilson and Streater, for John Spencer at Sion College, 1658, p. 569.

¹² Tr. Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1944.

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the second, eikon. In French, similitudo emerges as la similitude and becomes in actual usage equivalent with la comparaison, some authors distinguishing between this as a figure of speech and la vraie comparaison, meaning a literal comparison.¹³ In speaking of imago, Edmond Faral¹⁴ attempts no French translation but notes: "L'imago . . . rapproche non plus deux idées, mais deux êtres." It has, he continues, "un rapport étroit" with the similitude. The English translation by Caplan uses the word comparison for similitudo¹⁵ and simile for imago.¹⁶

Examination of French and French-English dictionaries reveals that the terms comparaison, similitude, and image are, in French usage, practically interchangeable. The New French-English, English-French Dictionary lists as a definition of comparaison: "Rhet. simile, similitude." For image: "Rhet. similitude, comparison, metaphor"; for similitude: "Rhet. simile, comparison." The Dictionnaire de la Langue Française¹⁷ is a little more explicit:

13 Hedwig Konrad, Etude Sur La Métaphore, Paris, Maurice Lavigne, 1939, p. 144.

14 Les Arts Poétiques du xii^e et du xiii^e Siècle, Paris, 1924, p. 69.

15 Rhetorica ad Herennium, p. 377.

16 Ibid., p. 385.

17 Emile Littié, ed., Paris, Gallimard et Hachette, 1958.

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similitude, Figure de rhétorique, dite aussi comparaison, par laquelle, pour éclaircir une idée ou pour orner le discours, on applique à un objet des traits de ressemblance empruntée à un objet différent.

The Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française distinguishes between the ordinary use of similitude and that which designates a figure of rhetoric.

similitude, didactique. Rapport exact entre deux choses. La similitude de deux triangles. Il se dit aussi d'une Figure de rhétorique qui est une comparaison prolongée. Les similitudes sont souvent employées dans l'Évangile.

For comparaison, the same dictionary gives the following definition:

comparaison, signifie encore Similitude et se dit de cette Figure de rhétorique dont les orateurs et les poètes se servent en comparant une chose ou une personne à quelque autre, pour orner le discours ou pour y apporter de la clarté. /Examples follow, including the sentence: "La Métaphore n'est qu'une comparaison dont un terme est sous-entendu."/

Il se dit des Rapprochements rapides que l'on fait de deux objets dissemblables, mais entre lesquels on établit par la pensée une certaine analogie. Beau comme le jour, Prompt comme l'éclair, Bavard comme une pie sont des comparaisons.

The question arises whether the "Rapprochements rapides" referred to may properly be considered similes in English as they are admitted as comparaisons in French. Faral cites examples of this type of comparison in speaking of the similitudo per brevitatem,¹⁸ although none of the examples given by the author of ad Herennium fit exactly

¹⁸ Op. Cit., p. 69.

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into this pattern. Some grammarians maintain a strict rule of differentiation between true similes and "mere comparisons." Others feel that the difference is too slight to warrant different classifications. Frank Wilstach, in the preface to his Dictionary of Similes, chooses the easy solution:

I have taken the liberty, rather broadly, of including in this book, as an aid for reference, a number of comparisons from various sources which would not technically come under the definition of simile. There is, of course, a thin shade of difference, but one overlooked by many grammarians. However, when one can, without undue license, enlarge the usefulness of a book of reference there is no necessity of allowing research to be embarrassed by unimportant breaches of definition. The reader will find, I trust, the few comparisons in this dictionary quite as welcome as the out and out similes.¹⁹

Among the 19,300 entries listed by Wilstach, representing some 2405 authors, 85 are credited to Chaucer. Almost without exception these "similes" fit into the category of "Rapprochements rapides que l'on fait de deux objets dissemblables, mais entre lesquels on établit par la pensée une certaine analogie." Had Wilstach drawn a line of distinction between simile and comparison, he would have had to leave Chaucer almost unrepresented.

In his excellent study of imagery, Father Stephen Brown, S.J., has probed the problem of the exact definition

19 P. xvi.

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of simile most minutely. Closely following the grammarian Genung, Father Brown states:

When the two objects so likened to each other belong to the same order of being we have merely a comparison; when they belong to different orders of being we have the figure known as simile. It is the likeness or analogy perceived amid essential unlikeness that makes the figure.²⁰

In restating Genung's basic distinction, Father Brown has paraphrased a crucial point: "In order that Resemblances may be figurative the things compared must differ in kind."

[Emphasis supplied.]²¹ Although Father Brown's phrase, "different orders of being," might at first seem an accurate equivalent, the examples cited by way of illustration indicate that Father Brown's definition of simile is more restricted than Genung's. According to the latter:

To be a simile, the comparison . . . must be between objects of different classes. Thus, to compare a chariot-race with a boat-race, events of the same class; is no simile, such as we see when, in the Bible, chariots are said to "run like the lightnings." It is the actual likeness deduced from essential unlikeness that makes the figure.²²

The "essential unlikeness" between "chariots" and "the lightnings" is beyond dispute. But the problem becomes more complex in view of the example cited by Father Brown:

20 The World of Imagery, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1927, p. 118.

21 John F. Genung, Practical Rhetoric, p. 89, quoted by Stephen J. Brown, S.J., Op. Cit., note, p. 118.

22 -----, Practical Elements of Rhetoric with Illustrative Examples, Boston, Ginn & Co., 1891, p. 89.

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Thus the familiar line

Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax
is, strictly speaking, a comparison only and not a simile; for the two objects compared, however different, are both material; and the quality in which they resemble one another, viz. blueness, is literally in both.²³

If the common attribute of materiality is sufficient to exclude a set of terms from the category of simile, relatively few examples of this figure will be found, even among the examples cited by the ancient rhetoricians. For example, in the Rhetorica ad Herennium, the simile (imago), which is defined as "the comparison of one figure with another, implying a certain resemblance between them," is illustrated by the following sentence: "He entered the combat in body like the strongest bull, in impetuosity like the fiercest lion."²⁴ Indeed the person in question has in common with the bull and lion not only materiality but also animality. Likewise the example from the Iliad, quoted by Aristotle to distinguish simile from metaphor, "Ἀχιλλεύς leapt on the foe as a lion,"²⁵ would also have to be eliminated for the same reasons as those adduced above. If Aristotle and the author of ad Herennium exemplify simile with comparisons of man and animal, representing two orders of being within the

23 Stephen Brown, Op. Cit., p. 118.

24 Harry Caplan, tr., p. 385.

25 Rhetoric, tr. W. Rhys Roberts, New York, Modern Library Edition, 1954, p. 173.

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larger classification of materiality, it would seem that Father Brown's boundaries in regard to simile are drawn too narrowly.

However, Father Brown's second consideration is perhaps the more significant. He suggests that simile does not exist if the quality in which the resemblance lies be literally in both objects. The point is well taken, even if the appeal on a literal level to "fairy" anything is somewhat dubious. Hedwig Konrad carries this point even further in stating that the figurative element required must always be that of hyperbole. The following observations occur in a context in which the essence of metaphor and metaphorical comparison (simile) is being examined:

Dans les deux cas, nous voyons un objet comparé à un autre, non par suite d'une simple ressemblance, mais parce que cet autre paraît le représentant par excellence de cette base de comparaison. Si on dit: cette jeune fille ressemble à une fleur ou qu'elle est comme une fleur, on a pris ce terme parce que la fleur semblait un élément nettement représentatif de la fraîcheur la plus pure, du charme par excellence. Il en est de même de tous les autres exemples que l'on pourrait citer: ses dents sont éclatants comme des perles, ses lèvres sont comme du corail, ses yeux comme des étoiles, etc.

C'est ce fait qui permet de dire que toute comparaison implique, comme la métaphore, une hyperbole. La comparaison métaphorique se distingue de la vraie comparaison par l'exagération. (Comparez: il est fort comme son père, avec il est fort comme un lion. Elle est belle comme sa soeur, avec elle est belle comme une rose.) Dans la première nous trouvons une comparaison exacte, dans la seconde nous entendons une exagération voulue. Dans l'une et l'autre métaphore, il y a un rapprochement d'un objet avec un autre objet qui se présente à nos

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yeux comme l'exemple le plus parfait d'un de ses attributs; si l'attribut dont il s'agit n'est pas expressément nommé, il y a abstraction. Ainsi dans la phrase: elle est comme une rose, on fait abstraction des attributs de la rose, tout comme dans une métaphore.²⁶

Obviously Konrad's principle of hyperbole as the essence of metaphorical comparison is valid only in the type of example given here, earlier referred to as "rapprochements rapides." The very structure of phrases like "white as snow" or "brave as a lion" exacts the use of an example which represents the superlative manifestation of the quality delineated. However in more complex structures such as the epic simile in which, for instance, a human action is envisioned as similar to some phenomenon in nature, either visually or audibly, the comparison does not necessarily involve hyperbole.

Instead of attempting to formulate a definition which would reconcile such divergent points of view, it seems preferable simply to specify what will be discussed under the term simile in regard to the writings of Chaucer. Comparisons in which the terms remain disparate, generally including a word such as like or as, analogous to the examples given by the author of ad Herennium for both imago and similitudo, will be considered similes for the purposes of this study. Short comparisons, although excluded by the stricter rhetoricians, will be considered as data to be examined because of

26 Konrad, Op. Cit., p. 144.

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their function as imagery, and because the expression "Chaucer's similes" immediately evokes remembrance of phrases such as "coy as is a maid" and "brown as a berry." These will generally be designated as comparisons to distinguish them from the more complex and extended figures more properly known as similes.

CHAPTER II

SIMILES AND THE LITERARY TRADITION

1. The Simile in Antiquity

The use of simile may be traced farther back than Homer's work and the Old Testament--the two foremost sources of this figure in the literature of antiquity. Philip Wheelright, in his excellent study on metaphor,¹ asserts that the "earliest known instance of the light symbol is found at Sippar in ancient Mesopotamia, toward the end of the third millennium B. C." Archaeologists believe this to be the site of "the oldest school of which there is any record." Inscribed on a stone which probably served as lintel to the main entrance of the school are words including a metaphorical comparison, of the kind generally considered simile: "May he who sits in the places of learning shine like the sun!"

Frank J. Wilstach speculates that the origin of simile goes even farther back than this. He suggests that "if our first parents had had a Boswell, many similes which are now in general use would be known as having been current in the Garden of Eden."² Among those which he would credit

¹ Metaphor and Reality, Indiana University Press, 1962, p. 116.

² A Dictionary of Similes, Boston, 1924, p. xi.

arbitrarily to Adam are "cold as ice," "busy as a bee," "proud as a peacock," "weak as water," "angry as a wasp," and "bitter as gall." Although Wilstach indicates in his preface that he recognizes a difference between simile and comparison, he refers to these phrases unequivocally as similes.

Anyone familiar with the books of the Old Testament, especially Proverbs and the Psalms, realizes that such phrases were commonplace in the language of the inspired writers. Among the most usual of these Wilstach cites: "still as a stone," "white as snow," "firm as a stone," "unstable as water," and "melted like wax."³ Thus a large number of the comparisons used by Chaucer are undoubtedly derived from Holy Scripture--either directly or as incorporated into the everyday language of Christian Europe.

But the Hebrew writers used similes far more imaginative than the comparisons listed above. Some of these found their way explicitly into Chaucer's writings, either quoted directly from Solomon or referred to as occurring in the writings of the Fathers. For example, the simile found in Proverbs, 11:22, "Like a golden ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman with a rebellious disposition,"⁴ appears

3 Idem.

4 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine translation, New York, Benziger Brothers, 1958.

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in the Wife of Bath's Prologue,

A fair womman, but she be chaast also,
Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose. (784-5)

and again, this time with further elaboration, in the Parson's Tale:

O goode God, ye wommen that been of so greet beautee, remembreth yow of the proverbe of Salomon. He seith: "Likneth a fair womman that is a fool of hire body lyk to a ryng of gold that were in the groyn of a soughe." For right as a soughe wroteth in everich ordure, so wroteth she hire beautee in the stynkyng ordure of synne. (154-6)

So familiar are certain similes from the Psalms that one may forget that they were ever invented.

Be not vexed over evildoers, nor jealous of those who do wrong; for like grass they quickly wither, and like green herbs they wilt. (Ps. 36:1)

As the hind longs for the running waters, so my soul longs for you, O God. Athirst is my soul for God, the living God. (Ps. 41:2)

Let them dissolve like a melting snail, like an untimely birth that never sees the sun. Unexpectedly, like a thornbush, or like thistles, let the whirlwind carry them away. (Ps. 57:9-10)

O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like earth, parched, lifeless and without water. (Ps. 62:2)

As smoke is driven away, so are they driven; as wax melts before the fire, so the wicked perish before God. (Ps. 67:2)⁵

Coincidentally, it appears that this kind of simile, more explicit and imaginative than the rapid comparison yet lacking

5 Idem.

the expansiveness of Homeric simile, is the predecessor of the type found in Ovid, especially in the Metamorphoses.

Wilstach quotes other sources outside of Holy Writ which testify to the ancient use of simile. One of these antedates the Exodus of the Israelites:

In the time of Rameses II of Egypt, 1292-1225 B. C., according to Breasted's "History of Egypt", the Poem of Pentaur was written. The heroic Theban poet's work was so highly prized that it was carved on the temple walls in hard stone. Pentaur was not ignorant of the simile. Thus he speaks of Pharaoh:

"His heart is firm, his courage is like that of the god of war."

"His courage is firm, like that of a bull."

"The King is dreadful as the grim lion in the valley."

"He appeared like the sun-god at his rising in the early morn."

Of Seit, the father of Rameses II, an unlocked inscription says: "He is as a jackal which rushed prowling through the land, as a grim lion that frequents hidden paths, as a powerful bull with sharpened horns." Now this Rameses, Ramses, or Ramessu, was that Pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites, the father of the princess who found the child Moses hid among the bulrushes.⁶

With Homer the simile establishes itself as an integral element of epic, as it had no doubt played a vital role in the earlier heroic tales of oral tradition. Although somewhat digressive in nature, drawing upon disparate material for its comparisons, the epic simile nevertheless contributes effectively to the unity of the work as a whole and to its sense of sublimity. Paradoxically it adds to the sublimity of tone even when comparing the most grandiose

⁶ Wilstach, Op. Cit., p. xi.

exploits to a familiar world. The indispensable contribution of epic similes is recognized not only by Homeric scholars of the past but even by those modern editors who retain them even when they edit the Iliad, as does W. H. D. Rouse, in order to present "the plain story of Homer, omitting the embellishments which were meant only to please the ear--stock epithets and recurring phrases where the meaning is of no account."⁷ How better could the reckless bravery of Diomedes be depicted than by reproducing Homer's simile?

If he had been eager to fight before, now he was three times as wild. He was like a lion when he has leapt into the sheepfold after the woolly flocks, and the shepherd has wounded but not killed him. But this only makes the lion more furious, and the shepherd defends the sheep no more, but slinks into the hut and leaves them helpless in panic; they huddle in heaps, and the maddened beast leaps out of the fold. So Diomedes maddened fell upon the Trojans.⁸

Adhering to the same tradition in regard to the use of simile are Virgil's Aeneid, a work certainly known by Chaucer, and Statius' Thebaid, a work which influenced him at least indirectly. Chaucer's famous condensation of the Aeneid into a little over three hundred octosyllabic lines precluded by its very nature the inclusion of epic simile. From Statius, either directly or through Boccaccio, Chaucer

⁷ Homer, The Iliad, The Story of Achilles, tr. W. H. Rouse, New York, The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1950 (no pagination in preface).

⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

borrowed occasionally. For example, as B. A. Wise has observed,⁹ the following Chaucerian passage from the Knight's Tale is derived ultimately from Statius:

The chaungen gan the colour in hir face,
 Right as the hunters in the regne of Tráce,
 That stondeth at the gappe with a spere,
 Whan hunted is the leon or the bere,
 And hereth hym come russhyng in the greves,
 And breketh bothe bowes and the leves,
 And thynketh, "Heere cometh my mortal enemy!
 Withoute faille, he moot be deed, or I;
 For outhur I moot sleen hym at the gappe,
 Or he moot sleen me, if that me myshappe." (1637-46)

The original version in the Thebaid reads as follows:

Qualis Gaetulae stabulantem ad confraga silvas Venator longo motum clamore leonem Expectat firmans animum et sudantia nisu Tela premens; gelat ora pavor gressusque tremescunt, Quis veniat quantusque, sed horrida signa frementis Accipit et caeca metitur murmura cura. (IV, 494)¹⁰

Wise expresses dissatisfaction with the position taken by Henry Ward who merely points out that Chaucer combined two passages of the Teseide to produce this simile,¹¹ because

⁹ The Influence of Statius upon Chaucer, Baltimore, J. H. Furst Co., 1911, p. 90.

¹⁰ "Even so a hunter awaits a lion roused by long shouting from his lair in the brushwood of a Gaetolian forest, steeling his courage and holding his spear in a per-spining grip; his face is frozen in terror and his steps tremble; 'what beast approaches?' he wonders, and 'how mighty?' and he hears the roar that gives ominous signal, and measures the growing sound in blind anxiety." --Tr. J. H. Mozley, London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1928, I, 543-5.

¹¹ Marginal Notes to the Knightes Tale, Chaucer Society, Six-Text Print. Cited by Wise, p. 90.

Boccaccio's version is in turn "a close adaptation of the lines just quoted from Statius."¹² But, according to Wise, the context differs in the three occurrences of this simile.

Statius introduces the simile to depict the dread of Eteocles as to the answer of the oracle. Boccaccio uses it to portray the fear of Palamon and Arcita at the beginning of the tournament while Chaucer had transferred it to the occasion of their duel where it is much more appropriate.¹³

This type of simile Chaucer used sparingly and, as will be seen later, most judiciously. Far more numerous are similes of the type used by Ovid, a writer who undoubtedly exercised considerable influence upon Chaucer.

The type of simile found in the Heroides and in the Metamorphoses proved useful to Chaucer as well as the plot suggestions he borrowed from Ovid. Many Chaucerian passages are reminiscent of Ovid's burning fields, roaring seas, and quivering leaves. Oenone's complaint to Paris may well have remained in Chaucer's memory to combine with a passage from the Hermaphrodite story of the Metamorphoses, yielding the famous simile which marks the climax of the Troilus:

We mingled our weeping, each a prey to grief; the
elm is not so closely clasped by the clinging vine
as was my neck by your embracing arms. (Her. V. 46-8)¹⁴

12 Wise, Op. Cit., p. 99.

13 Idem.

14 Heroides and Amores, with an English Translation by Grant Showerman, London, William Heinemann, 1914, p. 61.

So will the ivy round some lofty tree
Its tendrils twine; (Met. IV. 81)¹⁵

And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste,
Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,
Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde.
(Tr. III. 1230-32)

In the use of simile, Chaucer proved closer in spirit to Ovid than to any other of his predecessors in antiquity.

2. The Simile in the Literature of the Middle Ages

Anglo-Saxon bards of the heroic tradition, at least insofar as may be seen in the works extant, gave expression to their image-making tendencies in kenning more readily than in epic simile. The few examples noted by Tom Burns Haber¹⁵ are far less complex than those of Virgil:

Off over the choppy sea, wind-whipped,
The foam-throated thing went bobbing like a bird, (217-8)

. . . there started from his [Grendel's] eyes
Unlovely light in the very form of fire. (726-7)

Each of the nail-joints was very like steel. (985)

When it [the sword] all melted down as if it was
the ice
The Father unleashes from the chain of frost, (1608-9)¹⁶

Anglo-Saxon use of similitude is found more often in the prose, especially in the didactic literature which will be discussed below.

¹⁵ A Comparative Study of the Beowulf and the Aeneid Princeton, University Press, 1931, p. 75.

¹⁶ Edwin Morgan, tr., Beowulf, A Verse Translation into Modern English, Kent, Hand and Flower Press, 1952.

The French heroic tradition, expressed in the Song of Roland, which seems to have been written towards the end of the eleventh century, makes little use of simile. According to Dorothy L. Sayers, a recent translator and editor,

In the whole 4,000 lines there are scarcely more than half-a-dozen similes, and these, unlike the Homeric simile, are never elaborated for their own sake, but are expressed in the very minimum of obvious and simple words:

Leopard or lion was ne'er so fierce as he

White is his beard as any flower of spring

Even as the deer before the deerhound flees,
So before Roland the Paynims show their heels.¹⁷

Faral has noted that, although brief comparisons are exceedingly numerous both in Latin and the vernacular languages during all epochs, the "comparaison par parallèle" declined in frequency from the eleventh century onwards.

"Toujours est-il que la comparaison n'apparaît qu'exceptionnellement dans les chansons de geste, de même que dans tous les autres genres littéraires."¹⁸ However, Faral notes that there were exceptions to this general tendency.

On en trouve plusieurs, par exemple, dans le Roman des eles, où l'auteur fait des parallèles entre le marchand qui éprouve l'or à la pierre de touche et le ménestrel qui distingue dans les cours les belles coutumes et les mauvaises (v. 55 et suiv.), entre celui qui engloutit un morceau sans le savourer et celui qui ne reçoit de présent qu'à la fin de ses

¹⁷ London, Whitefriars Press, 1957, p. 28.

¹⁸ Edmond Faral, Les Arts Poétiques du xii^e et du xiii^e Siècle, Paris, 1924, p. 69.

services (v. 212 et suiv.), entre le chien qui empêche la vache de paître et l'envieux qui empêche autrui de jouir de son bien (v. 401 et suiv.), etc. Mais ce ne sont que des exceptions. Il y aurait un sujet d'étude dans les différences que présentent, à ce point de vue, les genres, les époques et les auteurs.¹⁹

The two versions of the Brut belong to the tradition making copious use of the brief comparison and limited use of the "comparaison par parallèle." Into straightforward narrative which resembles the pace of the Song of Roland and of Beowulf, Wace and Layamon introduce a motif of classical epic by their use of simile.

Between thirty and forty examples of metaphorical comparison and simile appear in Wace. Typical phrases of comparison include "thick as rain," "more numerous than the sand," "crimson as blood," "like to a boar grim in battle," "bare as a peasant's hovel," "words no weightier than the idle words on every gossip's lips," "brighter than the sun," "rage as a beast possessed," "abandon the realm like a dropped pouch," and "arrows flew like hail."²⁰ In only about five instances is the comparison carried beyond a bare minimum. Even then, the simile does not approach the typical Homeric expansiveness.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁰ Ernest Rhys, ed., Arthurian Chronicles: Wace and Layamon, New York, J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1912.

The Britons ranged like lions amongst their enemies. They were as lions anhungered for their prey, killing ewes and lambs, and all the sheep of the flock, whether small or great.²¹

The game of war is like a game of tables. Each must lose in his turn, and the player who wins to-day will fail to-morrow.²²

He turned grimly on his adversary, even as the boar, torn of the hounds and mangled by the hunting knife, turns on the hunter.²³

Now the Romans had lost their captain. They were as a ship upon the waters, without a rudder, that drifts here and there, having neither aim nor direction, at the bidding of the wind and waves. Such was the plight of the baily which was spoiled of its captain; for an army without a constable is less an army than a flock of sheep.²⁴

The sword smote upon the buckler as on an anvil. The earth shuddered beneath the weight of the fighting men, and the valley rang and clanged like a smithy with the tumult.²⁵

Layamon's use of simile, for the most part, resembles that of Wace, except that in the later work the figure appears with greater frequency. Layamon shows at times more originality in finding comparisons; however, he tends to repeat the same conventional phrases more often than

21 Ibid., p. 35.

22 Ibid., p. 41.

23 Ibid., p. 84-5.

24 Ibid., p. 94.

25 Ibid., p. 102.

does Wace. Among the fifty-odd similes and comparisons, lions, deer, boars, and wolves appear as terms at least fifteen times; hawks and hounds appear in their traditional roles in several others. Hordes, generally of fighters, are likened to falling hail, snow, or rain at least five times. More original are phrases such as "hid them like badgers," "heave them like feather balls," and "as still as if they would steal."

Layamon shows considerable advance over Wace in the number of extended similes, some of which resemble those of his predecessor in length:

Even with the words, as if it were wind, he pressed to the fight; as a whirlwind doth in the field, when it heaveth the dust high from the earth, all so Ridwathlan rushed on his enemies.²⁶

Up caught Arthur his shield, before his breast, and he gan to rush as the howling wolf, when he cometh from the wood, behung with snow and thinketh to bite such beasts as he liketh.²⁷

Arthur then called to his dear knights: "Advance we quickly, brave thanes! all together towards them; we all shall do well, and they forth fly, as the high wood, when the furious wind heaveth it with strength!"²⁸

But in at least five instances, Layamon far surpasses Wace in his imaginative use of the expanded simile; the following might well have been taken from Homer:

26 Ibid., p. 155.

27 Ibid., p. 185.

28 Idem.

Some [of the Saxons] gan wander, as the wild crane doth in the moorfen, when his flight is impaired, and swift hawks pursue after him, and hounds with mischief meet him in the reeds; then is neither good to him, nor the land nor the flood; the hawks him smite, the hounds him bite, then is the royal fowl at his death-time!²⁹

But of him [Childric] it is happened, as it is of the fox, when he is boldest over the weald, and hath his full play, and fowls enow; for wildness he climbeth, and rocks he seeketh; in the wilderness holes to him worketh. Fare whosoever shall fare, he hath never any care; he weeneth to be of power the boldest of all animals. But when come to him the men under the hills, with horns, with hounds, with loud cries; the hunters there hollow, the hounds there give tongue, they drive the fox over dales and over downs, he fleeth to the holm, and seeketh his hole; in the furthest end in the hold he goeth; then is the bold fox of bliss all deprived, and men dig to him on each side; then is there most wretched the proudest of all animals! So was it with Childric . . .³⁰

For yesterday was Colgrim of all men keenest, but now it is to him all as to the goat, where he guards the hill; high upon the hill he fighteth with horns, when the wild wolf approacheth toward him. Though the wolf be alone, without each herd, and there were in a fold five hundred goats, the wolf to them goeth, and all them biteth. So will I now today Colgrim all destroy; I am the wolf and he is the goat; the man shall die.³¹

The last two examples which follow might seem, at first sight, to be metaphors rather than similes, so completely fused are the terms of comparison. However, because the

29 Ibid., p. 186.

30 Ibid., p. 192.

31 Ibid., p. 196.

terms remain juxtaposed rather than completely identified, they retain the character of simile.

Yesterday was Baldulf of all knights boldest, but now he standeth on the hill, and beholdeth the Avon, how the steel fishes lie in the stream! Armed with sword, their life is destroyed; their scales float like gold-dyed shields; there float their fins, as if it were spears. These are marvellous things come to this land; such beasts on the hill, such fishes in the stream.³²

Yesterday was the kaiser keenest of all kings; now is he become a hunter, and horns him follow; he flieth over the broad weald; his hounds bark; he hath beside Bath his hunting deserted; from his deer he flieth, and we it shall fell, and his bold threats bring to nought; and so we shall enjoy our fights gained.³³

English metrical romance had little use for the simile, except for the brief comparisons that became stock expressions. In his edition of Libeaus Desconus, Max Kaluza has brought together the comparisons which occur; they may well represent the typical usage in this genre:

. . . A gipell whit as melk 248; Melk-whit was her destrere 132; Melkwhit was her face 944; A lady whit as flour 1489; ladies whit as swan 1457; A gerfaucoun whit as swan 773; swart as pich 620; His scheld was blak as pich 1363; As blak as brond ybrent 1659; Her i^{en} gray as glas 943; As rose her rode was red 937; Roddy as rose on ris 1322; In rose reed armure 1628; His berd was zelow as wax; be her schon on hir heed As gold wire schineb briqt 938 f.; Hir body and hir winge Schine in alle pinge As amall gay and geld 2098 ff.; clere

32 Ibid., p. 196.

33 Idem.

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As rose in erbere 955 f.; Her browes as selke brede 940; As briȝt as blosme on brere 624; He was of all colours, þat man māy sen of flours Betwene midsomer and may 1075 ff. 34

A short passage incorporating some of these comparisons shows that Chaucer did not have to depart far from his models to produce his Sir Thopas. The following description is of Teodelain the dwarf:

þe dwerȝ was cloped in inde [indigo]
 Before and ek behinde
 Stout he was and pert.
 Among alle cristne kinde
 Swich on schold no man finde;
 His surcote was overt.
 His berd was ȝelow as wax,
 To his gerdell heng his fax;
 I dar well say in certe.
 His schon wiþ gold wer diȝt
 And coped as a kniȝt;
 þat semed no poverté.³⁵

On the other hand, the Pearl Poet's Arthurian tale, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, written in the alliterative poetry of the revival, employs almost no simile or comparison. A few expressions such as "stone still," "pure as gold," and "whiter than the snow that lies on the hills" may be found. But the only striking comparison is the one which might be expected of this author: "As a pearl among white peas is of more worth than they, so is Gawain, i' faith, by other knights."³⁶

³⁴ Leipzig, Verlag Von C. R. Reisland, 1890, p.CXVIII.
³⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁶ Jessie L. Weston, tr., in College Book of English Literature, ed. James E. Tobin et al, New York, American Book Co., 1949, p. 134.

If the use of simile became virtually limited to stock comparisons in the English and French traditions, however, it found new growth among the Italian writers who belong, at least peripherally, to the epic tradition. The two authors who most influenced Chaucer among these were Dante and Boccaccio.

Whether the Divine Comedy may correctly be classified as epic is a moot point. In some ways its scope exceeds that of any other work professing to be epic; its hero has transcended the limits of any one culture to represent all of human kind. But in this discussion, categorizing is relatively unimportant. What must be considered is the possibility that Dante's use of simile may, directly or indirectly, have served as a model for Chaucer. Reacting against an exaggeration of the nature of this influence John Speirs writes:

The way the comparison with Dante is sometimes made is misleading as well as damaging. There is a correspondence in the design and in the detail--in the actual handling of words by the two mediaeval poets. Chaucer's similes correspond to Dante's in being used to clarify--often visually--and animate the meaning.³⁷

Perhaps no writer before or since has surpassed Dante in a functional use of simile. Impelled to re-create for his addressees a vivid realization of mystical realities,

³⁷ Chaucer the Maker, London, Faber and Faber, 1951, p. 42-3.

Dante seizes upon the most concrete images which can help make experiences or emotions communicable. Like the epic writers in the Homeric tradition he frequently draws his terms from nature, but unlike them, he never gives the impression of having had to go far afield for his material. Even in the most exalted passages, as for example in Canto XXXIII of the Paradiso, he can gracefully make a comparison with the homeliest gesture, enhancing rather than diminishing the sublimity of the scene. Describing the ecstatic devotion of the blessed souls towards Mary, he says,

And as an infant who, after he has nursed,
stretches his arms toward his mother
through gratitude which shows outwardly,

each of those bright souls stretched upward
with its flames, so that the great affection
they had for Mary was evident to me.³⁸

At every turn, Dante's disarming simplicity seems to be a key to the majesty of his writing.

W. P. Ker, in his essay "Similes of Dante," analyzes and assesses the nature of the debt Chaucer owed to Dante. Both writers, he believes, departed from the practice of those who used the commonplace

epic similes of lions among deer, or wolves among sheep, which must have been of old standing long before Homer. A different kind of simile may be

³⁸ The Divine Comedy, A New Prose Translation, with an introduction and notes by H. R. Huse, New York, Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1959, p. 436.

quoted from Chaucer to prove a different kind of poetical influence upon the disciples of Dante-- the example of Dante's vivid imagination moving his scholar, not to borrow directly, but to think in a similar way . . .³⁹

By way of illustration, Ker cites the famous passage from Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale:

Have ye nat seyn some tyme a pale face,
Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad
Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,
And swich a colour in his face hath had,
Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad,
Amonges alle the faces in that route?
So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute. (645-51)

Ker finds the stamp of Dante in the way that Chaucer translates "his emotional meaning into a pictorial image, and chooses to do so without going very far from his subject."⁴⁰ This homogeneous type of simile is often more effective than the heterogeneous type characteristic of Homer,⁴¹ notwithstanding Quintilian's remark that "the more remote the simile is from the subject to which it is applied, the greater will be the impression of novelty and the unexpected which it produces."⁴² Dante seems to have prized reënforcement of idea above novelty and surprise.

³⁹ Essays on Medieval Literature, New York, Macmillan, 1905, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Idem.

⁴¹ James Whaler, "The Miltonic Simile," PMLA, Vol. 46 (1931), p. 1034-74; "Animal Simile in Paradise Lost," PMLA, Vol. 46 (1932), p. 534-553.

⁴² Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian, tr. H. E. Butler, 4 vols., London, Wm. Heinemann, 1922, Vol. III, p. 253.

Chaucer seems to have learned his technique not only from Dante directly but also through Boccaccio as intermediary. According to Ker,

He [Boccaccio] is not absolutely the first [of the modern writers to try for the form and spirit of classical literature] for Dante was before him. Dante was the first to realize the value and the possibilities of the ancient devices in modern poetry; and some part, not a small part, of Boccaccio's work is to popularize the methods of Dante; for instance in that use of the epic simile which was introduced in English poetry by Chaucer, and which Chaucer learned from Dante and Boccaccio.⁴³

The immediate influence of Boccaccio may readily be seen in the case of similes transplanted with little or no change into Chaucer's work. For example, in the second book of Troilus and Criseyde the hero's reactions are described in a Boccaccian simile:

But right as floures, thourgh the cold of nyght
Iclosed, stoupen of hire stalke lowe,
Redressen hem ayein the sonne bright,
And spreden on hire kynde cours by rowe,
Right so gan tho this eighen up to throwe
This Troilus . . . (Tr. II. 967-71)

A translation of Boccaccio's version in Canto II of Il Filostrato reveals that little change has been introduced:

As little flowers that droop and close in the chill of night all open out and stand straight upon their stalks when the sun brightens, so was it with Troilus's weary spirit.⁴⁴

⁴³ "Boccaccio," in Ker, Op. Cit., p. 68.

⁴⁴ The Story of Troilus as told by Benoit de Sainte-Maure, Giovanni Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer and Robert Henryson, ed. and tr., R. K. Gordon, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1934, p. 49.

However, it is important to remember that Chaucer did not indiscriminately borrow Boccaccio's similes. One of the main contentions of Hubertis Cummings in his study, Indebtedness of Chaucer to the Italian Works of Boccaccio, is that whereas Boccaccio's work is "pseudo-classic," Chaucer's is "only intermittently so."⁴⁵ In regard to Il Teseide Cummings observes:

The Italian poem abounds in classical allusions, and in its use of Homeric similes it is hardly inferior to the Divina Commedia itself. . . . Chaucer, of course, retains a number of Boccaccio's classical imitations. . . . The Homeric simile he drops in his briefer metrical romance. But more significant than these details, which are abandoned or retained, is the new atmosphere which the poet creates in the Knight's Tale, a work which does not for a moment receive its colour from the pseudo-classicism that survives partially in its material.⁴⁶

Thus, although Chaucer learned technique in the use of epic simile from Dante and Boccaccio, he found relatively little place for it in the rapidly paced narratives in which he excelled. For the most part, he followed in the footsteps of his Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and French predecessors, contenting himself with the briefest of comparisons.

The entire tradition of epic simile in the Middle Ages is dwarfed when compared with the overwhelmingly popular

⁴⁵ Menasha, Wisconsin, George Banta Publishing Co., 1916, p. 143.

⁴⁶ Idem.

use of similitude, growing out of Old Testament tradition and hallowed by the way in which Our Lord Himself incorporated it into the core of His teaching technique. It is difficult to draw an exact line of distinction between similitude and parable. The former, extended to great length, grows into the latter; basically their essence is identical. Following the example of their Master, the Apostles and their successors heralded the "good tidings" to all nations of the then known world; later the Fathers and Doctors committed oral tradition to writing, patterning much of their style upon the New Testament. Thus every country of Christian Europe in the Middle Ages inherited a centuries-old custom of teaching supernatural realities by likening them to known phenomena. Books were compiled as aids to preachers in finding apt similitudes. One such volume which according to Harry Caplan, was recommended to the cleric is "A Book of Similitudes, the Summa de exemplis et rerum similitudinibus libris decem constans (ca. 1390) of Joannes Gorinus of San Gemignano, which supplies the preacher with every kind of material for moralistic comparison."⁴⁷ A copy of this work, printed in 1499, may be found among the incunabula at the Library of Congress.⁴⁸ A glance at the

⁴⁷ "Classical Rhetoric and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching" in Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians, ed. Raymond F. Howes, Ithaca, Cornell U. Press, 1961, p. 83.

⁴⁸ Hain No. 7547.

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titles of the subdivisions of this work indicates that its emphasis on natural science takes precedence over the moral theology it is intended to illustrate.

- I. De celo & elementis
- II. De metallis & lapidibus
- III. De vegetabilibus & Plantis
- IV. De natatilibus & volatilibus
- V. De animalibus terrestribus
- VI. De homine & membris eius
- VII. De visionibus & sonnis
- VIII. De canonibus & legibus
- IX. De artificibus & rebus artificialibus
- X. De actibus & moribus humanis

The kind of similitude found in this book appears in profusion in the extant sermons of preachers contemporary with Chaucer. And so naturally do he and Langland incorporate such similitudes into their writings that, except for the differences of meter, it would be difficult to determine which of the following excerpts came from Piers Plowman and which from pulpit or pilgrim.

"Ac yet I am in a were . what charite is to mene."
 "It is a ful trye tree," quod he . "trewly to telle.
 Mercy is þe more þer-of . þe myddel stokke is reuthe,
 þe leues ben lele wordes . þe lawe of holycherche,
 þe blosmes beth boxome speche . and benygne lokyng;
 Pacience hatte þe pure tre . and pore symple of herte,
 And so, þorw god and þorw good men . growthe þe frute
 charite." (P.P., B. XVI. 3-9)⁴⁹

Pride may well be likened . . . vn-to þe fallynge evill
 /epilepsy/. For who-so is in þat sekene, he leses all
 is witt; and he hath no knolache of no þinge; and
 þerfore he reche not wheþure þat he fall in fyre or

⁴⁹ Langland's Vision of Piers Plowman, ed. W. W. Skeat, Text B, London, Oxford (E.E.T.S. No. 38), 1869, p. 288.

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watere. Likewyse a proude man hath no knolage, for
he knowip not God ne is ney bore ne hymselfe . . .⁵⁰

And Salomon seith that 'he that entremetteth hym of
the noyse of strif of another man is lyk to hym that
taketh an hound by the eris.' For right as he that
taketh a straunge hound by the eris is outhewhile
biten with the hound, right in the same wise is it
resoun that he have harm that by his impatience med-
leth hym of the noyse of another man, wheras it
aperteneth nat unto hym. (Mel. 1542-3)

Modern prejudice against "didacticism" in literature may cause readers at times to look condescendingly upon medieval man's "allegorizing tendencies" when they see that the same type of similitude found in homiletic works permeates books presumably read for pleasure, such as lapidaries and bestiaries. The ease with which the early writers referred all their observations to moral truth indicates that for them, such transfer of thought was not something artificial, but rather the natural outgrowth of looking upon God's creation as a reflection of His own beauty and goodness. From the Psalmist who sang, "The heavens show forth the goodness of God, and the firmament proclaimeth the work of his hands," to Gerard Manley Hopkins who echoed his thought, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," there have always been men with a sacramental view of nature.

⁵⁰ Middle English Sermons, Edited from British Museum MS. Royal 18B. xxiii by Woodburn O. Ross; London, Oxford University Press (E.E.T.S. O.S. 209), 1940, p. 69.

such a view seems to have been the prevalent one in the age of Chaucer. What could be more natural than to draw lessons of marital fidelity from the turtle-dove, of spiritual renewal from watching ecdysis in the serpent?

But although the pulpit overflowed, as it were, into the lapidaries and bestiaries, its influence is conspicuously absent in the liturgical dramas. Examination of the plays in the Towneley cycle, for example, reveals no tendency to sermonize by similitude. Actually the only similes that occur with frequency are the short comparisons characteristic of colloquial style in prose and conventional forms in verse. Obviously, some derive from the original texts in Holy Scripture, as for example, in Jacob's speech:

Thou hete me, Lord, to do well with me,
to multiplye my seede as sand of see;⁵¹

but most of them are merely stock expressions, clichés even in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: "brighter then is the sun," "tatyrd as a foyll [fool]," "hevy as leyde," "right as a wall," "styll as ston," "as clene as cristall clyfe," "light as lynde," "brighter than sun or moon," "as blossom bright on bogh," "bright as fyre," "stabyll as any steyll," "more fresh then floure de lyce," "as cleyn . . . as puryd syluer or shynand glas," "styll as stone in wall,"

⁵¹ George England, ed., London, Oxford (E.E.T.S.), 1897 p. 54.

"standys vp lyke a mast," "fare as floure in feylde," "as whyte as snaw," "light as leyfe on tre," "as a lam meke," "swetter than med," "prowde as pacok," "harde as stele," "dark as nyght," "sharper than thorns," "sharp as a spere," "hy as a clowde," "stynke as dog in Dyke."⁵² Occasionally one speech will include a series of rapid comparisons to describe a person (a device reminiscent of the descriptio found in discussions of rhetoric), as for example:

For, as euer rede I pystyll, I have oone to my fere
 As sharp as thystyll, as rugh as a brere;
 She is browyd lyke a brystyll, with a sowre-loten chere;
 Had she oones wett hyr whystyll, she couth syng full
 clere

Her Paternoster.

She is greatt as a whall,
 She has a galon of gall;
 By hym that dyed for vs all,
 I wald I had ryn to I had lost hir!⁵³

In the Towneley plays the examples of extended comparison are few and far between, occurring only in the speeches of the more loquacious characters. The following simile is from a speech by Pilate:

ffor like as on both sydys the Iren the hamer makith
 playn,
 So do I, that the law has here in my kepyng;
 The right side to socoure, certys, I am full bayn,
 If I may get therby a vantage or synyng;

⁵² All comparisons here listed are from the above edition.

⁵³ A. C. Cawley, ed., The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle; Old and Middle English Texts, G. L. Brook, General Editor, Manchester University Press, 1958, Secunda Pastorum, 100-8, p. 46-7.

Then to the fals parte I turne me agayn,
 ffor I se more Vayll will to me be risyng;
 Thus euery man to drede me shal be full fayn,
 And all faynt of thare fayth to me be obeying.⁵⁴

In the play Thomas of India of the same cycle, Paul remarks of woman:

Till an appyl she is lyke--
 Withoutten faille ther is none slyke--
 In horde ther it lyse,
 But if a man assay it wittely,
 It is full roten inwardly
 At the colke within; ⁵⁵

Anyone familiar with the antifeminist bias of some preachers of the Middle Ages might well suspect the source of the above quotation.

Not only in liturgical drama but also in secular lyric the characteristic type of simile is the brief comparison rather than the extended similitude. Even when the serious lyric gave way to the cynical verse of the kind best represented by Jean de Meung's part of the Roman, this feature of poetic diction continued to prevail. Occasionally writers like Machaut used a particularly vivid simile; direct borrowings from him by Chaucer will be noted later. But in general, Chaucer in his fast-moving narratives merely accepted colloquial conventions and used metaphorical comparisons as did his predecessors and contemporaries.

54 XXII, The Scourging, 14-21, ed. England, p. 243.

55 XXVIII, 38-43, ed. England, p. 338.

CHAPTER III

CHAUCER'S USE OF SIMILE--EARLIEST WORKS

1. General Remarks.

John Speirs is one of the few modern critics to devote considerable attention to Chaucer's use of simile. Early in his book Chaucer the Maker¹ occurs a passage especially pertinent to this study. Although Speirs suggests that the reader accustomed to the complexities of Shakespearean metaphor and that of other Elizabethan dramatists may at first be disconcerted upon approaching Chaucer's poetry, he maintains that "Chaucer's phrases have an immediacy and vividness of image unmatched outside Shakespeare." Speirs then probes the question of differences between the approaches of the two masters.

. . . Chaucer's phrases appear almost disconcertingly simple and direct to a reader accustomed to the complexities, the encrustations of meaning involved in Shakespearean metaphor. Shakespeare's metaphors take effect instantaneously, but there is characteristically a remarkable complexity of meaning involved in them. Similes, not metaphors, are what are characteristic of Chaucer . . . and they lucidly promote the visualization essential to allegorical vision. For Chaucer's poetry may be understood as growing out of allegory. It grows well beyond allegory in the human comedy of Troilus and Criseyde and the Canterbury Tales. Nevertheless, we will not understand the art and vision of the Chaucerian poetry of the human comedy unless we

1 London, Faber and Faber, 1951, p. 25.

understand that it has developed without any absolute break from allegory. It would be easy to be deceived into supposing that no profundities of meaning comparable to the Shakespearean are concealed within the crystal transparency of the Chaucerian phrases. If (as Mr. Wilson Knight has said) a Shakespearean play may be regarded as an 'expanded metaphor', a medieval allegorical poem may perhaps be regarded as an 'expanded simile.'²

Several ideas, explicitly or implicitly contained, emerge from this long quotation, directing attention to areas which must be explored in any discussion of Chaucer's similes.

First, acceptance of Chaucer's simplicity as one of his most artistic features erects a caution against searching unduly for ambiguity in the modern vein. However, although Chaucer's diction is lucid, it is not pedestrian; instinctively one senses that his artistry conceals art and challenges him to analyze, if possible, how such deep significance can emerge from his uncomplicated diction. As Speirs observes a little later, "Chaucer has the faculty of seeming more simple than he is."³

Secondly, if the simile is "characteristic" of Chaucer, it might be assumed that this figure of speech would occupy a noticeable place throughout his work. Yet, strangely enough, long passages may be found in which

² Ibid., p. 25-6.

³ Ibid., p. 26.

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relatively few similes appear--and these few are often of the most trite and commonplace variety. Editors' notes reveal that most of the more extended similes are borrowed, either directly from the source material of the work at hand, or indirectly from Chaucer's favorite authors. Yet, paradoxically, all readers of Chaucer recognize that the use of simile is one of his strong points.

Thirdly, Speirs takes for granted, as do all other critics, that there was growth in Chaucer, that one can to a certain extent trace his maturation as a writer. This movement towards excellence may be seen in microcosm by isolating for study Chaucer's use of simile. In this relatively small area, it is possible to see the validity of Muscatine's now well accepted thesis⁴ that Chaucer never outgrew French influence, even as he added to his experience contact with Italian writings, and as he reached the height of his powers in the most artistic of the Canterbury Tales. To trace this growth in an orderly way, Chaucer's works will be discussed according to the general chronological divisions indicated by Robinson,⁵ although of course it is impossible to assign exact dates to the various works. A chapter will be devoted to each of Robinson's first three divisions; the final chapter will discuss the remaining Canterbury Tales.

⁴ Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, Berkeley, U. of California Press, 1960.

⁵ Robinson, Works, p. xxix.

Each work will be separately discussed, but the similes occurring in each will be grouped according to the distinctive patterns which emerge. Citations from predecessors or contemporaries will not generally be offered as "sources"; often they will merely indicate occurrences of material belonging to the "community" of the Middle Ages. Obviously there will be some instances in which the simile used by Chaucer is directly traceable to the basic source material. But a great deal of Chaucer's originality may be seen in the judicious selections he made when deciding how much material to borrow and how much to re-formulate.

Lastly, Speirs' statement that Chaucerian poetry "has developed without any absolute break from allegory" provides a clue to the difficulty encountered in trying to make a definitive list of Chaucer's similes. Ordinary definitions of this figure call for explicit comparison of two disparate things, usually expressed by a word such as like or as. In Chaucer's case, however, there are passages which function unmistakably as simile but lack the usual marks of recognition. Simile, example, analogy, parable--all partake of the same function, and Chaucer lets them overlap freely. Thus in several instances passages will be discussed which could not strictly speaking be categorized as simile, but which create such a strong sense of this figure that their omission would be culpable. For the writer of allegory must "promote . . .

visualization" if he wishes to communicate his deeper meaning; he need not scruple in manipulating the colors of rhetoric in hybrid ways. Speirs warns against seeing Chaucer's progress as one "from allegory to realism."⁶ The two are not incompatible if we may judge from the example of Piers Plowman.

Thus Speirs summarizes his argument:

Underneath Chaucer's presentation, almost dramatization, of the human comedy remain the mediaeval allegorical and moral patterns. The poems gain in profundity and variety from the mutual enrichment of these multiplex layers of meaning, though the Chaucerian phrase in itself is to the end remarkable for its crystalline and limpid simplicity.⁷

2. Chaucer's Earliest Works.

Under the heading "Before 1372" Robinson lists the following works of Chaucer:

The ABC (if composed for the Duchess Blanche); The Book of the Duchess (1369-70); and probably some of the early lyrics and complaints of the French type.⁸

Only the first two items will here be considered, as the formal lyrics contribute nothing significant to the study of Chaucer's similes. However, before examining even the ABC, it is necessary to focus attention upon the French work which Chaucer claims to have translated, whether the version extant be even partially his or not. For the Roman de la

⁶ Speirs, Op. Cit., p. 26.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Robinson, Works, p. xxix.

Rose exerted a formative influence on Chaucer and left its traces on his composition throughout his lifetime. This influence may clearly be seen in the use Chaucer makes of simile as it appears in the Roman, both in letter and in spirit. Indeed the temptation is to over-simplify and attribute too much of Chaucer's diction to this important work. However, Dean Spruill Fansler,⁹ who is apparently the foremost authority on the extent of the influence of the Roman on Chaucer, warns repeatedly against facile attribution in view of the sundry sources repeating the same commonplace phrases. Chaucer's debt to the Roman may be seen less in the copying of expressions than in their incorporation into the stream of his poetry. Fansler's observations in this regard deserve consideration.

Guillaume de Lorris seems to have been fond of short similes used descriptively. These are seldom more than a half-line in length. Very rarely, indeed, does either he or Jean de Meung employ the extended comparison which later was so characteristic of Dante. By Chaucer's day many similes had become stereotyped and so commonplace as to have lost almost all suggestiveness. Their use was subconscious, so to speak; at any rate, we may consider it as a stylistic trait, because such similes were thrown in to fill out a line or to carry forward a narrative or descriptive passage. Often, however, they only marked time: they were chiefly used, at least by Chaucer, I think we may say, as literary "padding."¹⁰

⁹ Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose, Columbia U. Studies in English and Comparative Literature, Vol. 8, New York, Columbia University Press, 1914.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

Thus it will be unnecessary to give more than passing attention to the numerous short similes of this kind which occur in all of Chaucer's works, except where it appears that he manipulated even these stock expressions for artistic purposes.

3. "Picturesque Negation."

One particular type of short simile examined by Fansler is of special importance to the student of Chaucer-- that ^{which} ~~this~~ he calls "picturesque negation." He explains the figure in this way:

By picturesque negation, or "gemeinschaftliche ausdrücke der geringschätzung," as Koeppel (Anglia, XIV, p. 262 ff.) calls it, is meant the undervaluation of some person, thing, attribute or quality, by means of a reductio ad absurdum comparison with a common, well-known object of little worth; as, "Swich talking is nat worth a boterflye" (B. 3980). This form of phraseology is said to have been introduced into Early Middle English from the French; it is fairly common in Latin and Middle High German, but does not appear to have been used in Old English. Chaucer seems to have been fond of such expressions, for they occur no less than sixty-five times throughout his work, and the comparisons are drawn from more than a score of different objects.¹¹

In a note Fansler prints a complete list of the terms used in Chaucer's picturesque negations and their exact location.¹² Analysis of Fansler's list reveals that

¹¹ Ibid., p. 74-5.

¹² Ibid., p. 75.

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Chaucer used some twenty-four separate objects of comparison with varying degrees of frequency.

mite	10	gnat	3	cress	1	jane	1
bean	8	haw	3	oyster	1	mote	1
straw	8	hen	2	corn	1	rush	1
fly	5	butterfly	2	groat	1	shoe	1
leek	4	bean-straw	1	hat	1	tord	1
tare	4	rake-handle	1	hay	1	while	1

Out of the sixty-five occurrences of this kind of phrase in Chaucer, there are only six cases in which the word of comparison occurs in such a position that it is not needed for rime; two other cases (both "not worth a stree") occur in prose passages. The characters who most often resort to this kind of phrase are Pandarus (seven times, using the words hat, haw, mite, fecches, groat, gnat, and bean), the Wife of Bath (six times: gnat, leek, haw, shoe, rake-handle, hen), the Merchant (six times: bean (2), leek, straw, hat, butterfly), and the Host (five times: mite, tord, bean, butterfly, hay).

It is at first surprising to see that statistically the sorrowing knight in the Book of the Duchess follows close behind these four cynical and outspoken characters. But although he uses the figure four times, his word of comparison is always stree; in this early period Chaucer had barely begun to experiment with the possibilities of variation. In the Hous of Fame, Dido's complaint avails her "not a stree" and the fifth group of suitors before the goddess Fame insist that they desire only the joys of

contemplation, but for fame they give "not a leek." "Merciless Beauty," a roundel assigned to Chaucer's early period (although listed by Robinson as "of doubtful authorship") uses the expression "not worth a bene" twice, but both instances are accounted for by the exacting demands of the rime scheme.

During the period of Italian influence, Chaucer seems to become increasingly aware of the flexibility of this figure of speech. Although the Parliament of Fowls employs it only once (in the remark of the goose: "Al thys nys not worth a flye") and the Knight's Tale only twice both times in the speech of Arcite), the Troilus and Criseyde contains many examples. None occur in the first two books, but with the argumentations and protestations of Book III the pattern is set. Thirteen such phrases occur in Books III, IV, and V. Surprisingly, only one example is found in the Legend of Good Women, and this in a form of expression used only three times altogether by Chaucer: the wall separating Pyramus and Thisbe is described as "deere ynogh a mite."

No especially striking patterns emerge from the scattered use of picturesque negation in the Canterbury Tales. Almost always used for rime, the term of comparison is usually bean, straw, mite, fly, or leek, depending on the demands of the sound structure of the couplet rather than

meaning. A few unique comparisons are made: the Wife of Bath is the only speaker to invoke a rake handle (M.E. rake-stele); the Clerk is the only user of the term jane, meaning a small Genoese coin. Only the host descends into vulgarity far enough to use the word tord for picturesque negation, and he does so in trying to find adequate reproof for Chaucer's perpetration of the parody Sir Thopas. But the only pilgrims who bypass the figure completely are the friar, the physician, the squire, and the prioress; some of the others use it only when assuming the voice of a character within a tale.

Fansler makes an interesting observation in regard to Chaucer's use of picturesque negation:

In spite of the fact that this device of emphatic undervaluation was frequently used in France (other than in the Roman de la Rose) and in England, before Chaucer's day, I cannot help thinking that the English poet's predilection for this trick of diction came from his reading of Jean de Meung; for by no other two writers is it so frequently used as by Chaucer and the author of the second part of the Roman de la Rose. I do not mean to say that the phrases were translated directly out of the French poem; such copying would be unnecessary. For, once a writer had the idea, he could ring all the changes of both verb and noun. So it was with Chaucer. All he needed, I should say, was a literary sanction of the usage (if, indeed, he would stand on ceremony), and he found authority in the Roman.¹³

Of the twenty-five objects which Jean de Meung used for forty-six comparisons of this sort and the one used by

¹³ Fansler, Op. Cit., p. 76-7.

Guillaume de Lorris, only five have been found "common to Chaucer and the two French poets." Thus the influence exerted by Jean de Meung upon Chaucer seems to have been one of method rather than of subject matter.

Although picturesque negation is pertinent to a discussion of simile because in spirit it represents the counterpart to metaphorical comparison depending upon hyperbole, it is not significant enough in any individual case to warrant further investigation in this study. Thus no mention will be made of examples of this type of simile occurring in the individual works.

4. The ABC.

Because the ABC is a translation of a portion of Deguilleville's Pélérinage de la Vie Humaine, it should not, strictly speaking, be discussed among Chaucer's original writings. In it only one simile occurs, an expression so solidly anchored in the Christian tradition that it scarcely seems like a figurative expression.

Right soo thi Sone list, as a lamb, to deye. (172)
Even when St. John the Baptist used the expression "the lamb of God," it seems that he was fully understood; neither by Chaucer's day nor ours can the signification be said to have lost its impact, representing as it does an impenetrable

mystery. But verbally considered, it was and is a commonplace. Langland used a more alliterative form of the same expression when he wrote:

He is as lough as a lomb & loueliche of speche.
(P. P., A. VI. 40)

Perhaps the most significant feature to be noted here in regard to the ABC is that, unlike the Roman de la Rose, it contains only one simile; thus it is seen that the French models which helped to form Chaucer as a writer differed widely in their employment of simile.

5. The Book of the Duchess.

The similes occurring in the Book of the Duchess, Chaucer's first significant work, will be considered under the following classifications: 1) stock comparisons; 2) literal comparisons with some degree of imaginative quality; 3) comparisons bordering upon example; and 4) similes of a more extended variety.

The expressions "cold as stone" (123) and "dead as stone" (1300) are completely traditional; "true as any bond" is a little less usual, the conventional term of comparison being generally steel. The description of the beloved one's throat which "Semed a round tour of yvoyre" (946) is simply a transfer of imagery from the Canticle of Canticles (7:4), not unusual in the erotic poetry of the Middle Ages.

Three comparisons rise a little above the realm of cliché by their form of statement.

This cave [that of Morpheus] was also as derk
As helle-pit overal aboute. (170-1)

Although at first glance this may seem to be a Dantean simile, Theodore Spencer¹⁴ has convincingly demonstrated that the concepts here represented, as well as most of those concerning hell, belonged to popular medieval literature, a heritage shared by Dante and Chaucer. The darkness of hell as it appeared to Drihthelm (Ecclesiastical History, V, 12) when he approached it from purgatory is cited by Spencer as a typical example:

[I] saw the place begin to grow dusk and filled with darkness. When I came into it, the darkness, by degrees, grew so thick that I could see nothing besides it and the shape and garment of him that led me.¹⁵

Similarly, the idea of an afterlife as a pit (or "put") stems from Hebraic times:

But yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit. (Is. 14:15)

and becomes firmly entrenched in the medieval tradition.

According to Spencer, there is a passage of twenty lines in

¹⁴ "Chaucer's Hell: A Study in Mediaeval Convention," Speculum, Vol. 2 (April, 1927), 177-200. Chaucer's conception of hell, according to Spencer, "far from being largely Dantesque, or, indeed, borrowed from any individual writer is, with one or two trifling exceptions, entirely dependent on the convention of infernal description which was prevalent in Chaucer's day." (p. 177)

¹⁵ Quoted by Spencer, Ibid., p. 189.

St. Patrick's Purgatory in which hell is spoken of eight times as a "put."¹⁶ In La Vision de Tundale too the protagonist sees hell as a pit with Satan at the bottom.¹⁷

The second imaginative comparison occurs in the description of a flowery countryside viewed by the dreamer before he discovers the sorrowing knight:

For both Flora and Zephirus,
They two that make floures growe,
Had mad her dwellynge ther, I trowe;
For hit was, on to beholde,
As thogh the erthe envye wolde
To be gayer than the heven,
To have moo floures, swiche seven,
As in the welken sterres bee. (402-9)

In his notes Skeat has suggested comparison of these lines with two passages from the Roman:

Zephirus et Flora, sa fame,
Qui des flors est deesse et dame,
Cil dui font les floretes nestre . . . (8449-51)

Les floretes i fait parair
E cum estoiles flanbosier,
Et les herbetes verdoier
Zephirus, quant sur mer chevauche. (5962-5)¹⁸

The third example, commonplace in form, causes the reader to focus his attention upon a paradox:

To gete her love no ner nas he
That woned at hom, than he in Ynde; (888-9)

16 Ibid., p. 181.

17 Idem.

18 W. W. Skeat, Oxford Chaucer, 6 vols. and Supplement, Oxford, 1894-97, Vol. I, p. 474. Subsequent references to this work will be cited "Skeat, Vol., p. "

The double meaning of the word near emerges; spatial proximity may not, and in this case, does not, insure accessibility to the beloved one.

The third type of comparison, bordering upon example, is used extensively in both the Roman de la Rose and in the poems of Machaut; Chaucer was accustomed to appreciating the associative power of simile. Instead of trying to erect a verbal superlative, the writer could simply point to some character in history, mythology, or other literature and affirm that his character's quality or plight exceeded that of the exemplar. Thus the sorrowing knight says of himself:

This ys my peyne wythoute red,
 Alway deyng and be not ded,
 That Cesiphus, that lyeth in helle,
 May not of more sorwe telle. (587-90)

Chaucer's words, according to both Skeat and Robinson, apply less to Cesiphus, or Sisyphus (mentioned along with Orpheus in Metamorphoses, X, 44), than to Tityus to whom Ovid refers without naming in the same context. This passage in Ovid is cited as a possible source for a similar idea in another complaint of the knight:

I have more sorwe than Tantale. (709)

Robinson, however, notes that "Ixion, Tantalus, and Sisyphus are also named near together in the Roman de la Rose, 19279-99"; this then may have been Chaucer's more immediate model.

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Later, the knight describes his pain of loss:

. . . Allas! that day
 The sorrowe I suffred, and the woo
 That trewly Cassandra, that soo
 Bewayled the destruccioun
 Of Troye and of Ilyoun,
 Had never swich sorwe as I thoo. (1244-9)

By such reference, the knight increases the impression not only of his own agony but also of the significance of the cause of his woe. This associative power of simile is one of its most important assets, as may be seen also from the knight's indignant reproof of the dreamer who suggests he might "repent" of love:

Shule y now repente me
 To love? Nay, certes, than were I wel
 Wers than was Achitofel,
 Or Anthenor, so have I joye,
 The traytor that betraysed Troye,
 Or the false Genelloun,
 He that purchased the tresoun
 Of Rowland and of Olyver. (1115-21)

Two other examples of this type of comparison may be seen in the Book of the Duchess. The knight turns his wrath upon Fortune, accusing her (in the traditional manner) of treachery.

Ful craftier to p lay she was
 Than Athalus, that made the game
 First of the ches, so was hys name. (662-4)

Although the originator of the game of chess is not known with certainty, it is attributed to Attalus III, King of Pergamus, about whom various legends exist. One of these is

cited by Sister M. Ernestine Whitman in the section of her study¹⁹ dealing with games known to Chaucer:

. . . One of these stories relates that chess was devised for the reproof and correction of a certain King Evilmorodach, a man so cruel that he "did hewe his faders body in three hondred pieces and gaf it to ete and devoure to three hondred byrdes that men calle vultress." The inventor of the game, a Greek philosopher called Philometer, or Xerxes, so successfully diverted the king from his evil habits that thereafter chess was popular with royalty.

Chaucer's reference indicates familiarity with this or a similar tale. Athalus, or Attalus III, King of Pergamus, is no other than the Philometer mentioned above; the source of information is probably the Romaunt de la Rose.²⁰

Actually, it would seem that Chaucer need not have known the legends themselves if he drew upon the passage in the Roman:

Car ainsinc le dist Athalus,
Que des eschez controva l'us. (6714-5)

The other example of associative simile shows that it is equally effective as a device for presenting the praiseworthy qualities of an individual. The bereaved knight, for instance, insists that he would have been enamored of Blanche even if he had had the "beaute/ That ever had Alcipyades," the "strengthe of Ercules," "the worthynesse of Alysaunder," or if he had been "hardy . . . as was Ector, or "wis as Mynerva." In contrast to this series of

¹⁹ Mediaeval English Domestic Life and Amusements in the Works of Chaucer, Washington, D. C. (Catholic U. of America dissertation), Murray & Heister, 1937.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 230.

conditions contrary to fact, he affirms without qualification that his beloved was indeed "as good . . . As ever was Penelope or Greece, / Of as the noble wif Lucrece." These last phrases may be viewed as making explicit a more general reference of the same variety made earlier in regard to the goodness of his beloved:

To speke of goodness, trewly she
Had as moche debonaire
As ever had Hester in the Bible,
And more, yif more were possyble. (985-8)

Whether the reader gains any real insight into the character described by such comparisons is questionable, but the point is effectively made that the knight considers Blanche as the paragon of womanly virtue, worthy of supreme devotion, and the narrator's concern is seen to be chiefly with the state of mind of the knight in this context.

Among the six examples of more extended simile found in the Book of the Duchess, none may be attributed to Chaucer's invention except perhaps one.

In the first extended simile, the knight describes the gracious impartiality of his beloved:

Therto she koude so wel pleye,
Whan that hir lyste, that I dar seye,
That she was lyk to torche bryght
That every man may take of lyght
Ynogh, and hyt hath never the lesse. (961-5)

Considerable attention to the possible sources for this simile has been given by editors. Skeat²¹ calls attention

²¹ Vol. I, p. 485.

not only to the passage from the Roman which will be discussed below, but also to one in the romance Alexander and Dindimus,²² a work which he edited for the E.E.T.S. The context is completely different from Chaucer's; Alexander has written ahead to a Brahman king to ask information about his people. He argues that sharing knowledge does not diminish it:

Of a torche pat is tend . tak an en-sample;
 pat pou; ludus of þe lem . lihtede an hundred,
 Hit scholde nouht lesen his liht . no þe latur brenne;
 While þe weke & þe waxe . vn-wastep lastep. 23
 & so it farus bi folk . pat fain is to teche; (233-7)

This passage is cited merely to indicate that the simile was proverbial in different contexts. The occurrence of it in the Roman is certainly more closely related to Chaucer's version:

Foolish is he who grudges happiness;
 One candle in a lantern can give light
 To many men and yet have plenty left.
 This simile is clear to all but fools.²⁴

Fansler suggests that Chaucer's use of the simile, including

22 Alexander and Dindimus: or the Letters of Alexander to Dindimus, King of the Brahmans, with the Replies of Dindimus; being a second fragment of the Alliterative Romance of Alisaunder translated from the Latin, about A.D. 1340-50. London, Oxford University Press, 1878.

23 Ibid., p. 10.

24 Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, The Romance of the Rose, Harry W. Robbins, tr., Charles W. Dunn, ed., New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1962, p. 151.

ambiguously the word pleye, is difficult to interpret. He quotes from Marteau, an editor of the Roman, who says:

Cette comparaison et la pensée qui précède sont assez obscures, ou tout au moins mal présentées. L'auteur veut dire: Jalousie prétend garder pour elle seule Bel-Accueil et ses charmes, comme l'avare son or: c'est sottise. En effet, qui obtient les faveurs d'une femme ne fait tort à personne. Allumer sa chandelle à celle d'un autre, est-ce lui faire tort? Pour un peu, Jehan de Meung dirait: Séduire la femme, c'est faire beaucoup d'honneur au mari. Mais il se contente d'affirmer que ce n'est pas lui faire tort, les charmes de la femme n'augmentant point à ne pas servir, pas plus que l'or au fond d'un sac. Petite économie!" 25

Fansler specifies three conclusions which suggest themselves as possibilities in trying to reconcile the incorporation of this passage into the speech of the bereaved knight:

(1) Either the English poet was not thinking of the French poem at all when he wrote the lines, or (2) he had this very passage of the Roman in mind, but interpreted it innocently, or (3) he understood Jean de Meung as Marteau understood him, but deliberately changed the application.²⁶

If the use of this simile in Jean de Meung were unique, it would hardly be possible to admit the second of Fansler's suggestions. However, since it had been long a commonplace, and since the context in Chaucer's poem does not seem to call for a cynicism comparable to that of the Amis in the Roman, it seems likely that Fansler is correct in saying that

25 Vol. II, p. 424, quoted by Fansler, Op. Cit., p. 178.

26 Fansler, Ibid., p. 178.

we lack evidence for supposing Chaucer meant anything more by the comparison than that Blanche, always beautiful, always gracious, without losing any of her charm kindled the hearts of all men that looked on her.²⁷

The second example of extended simile is of a kind used later by Chaucer in the Troilus:

For wher-so men had pleyd or waked,
Me thoghte the felawsshyppe as naked
Withouten hir, that sawgh I oones,
As a corowne withoute stones. (BD, 977-80)

This passage immediately calls to mind the scene of Troilus grieving before Criseyde's empty palace:

O paleys empty and disconsolat,
O thow lanterne of which queynt is the light,
O ryng, fro which the ruby is out falle,
And farwel shryne, of which the seynt is oute!
(Tr. V. 542-3; 549; 553)

Although this entire section of the Troilus is derived from Boccaccio, Robinson notes in regard to line 543: "The figure of the ruby is not in the Filostrato." But neither Skeat nor Robinson adds any note in regard to the crown-without-stones passage from the Book of the Duchess. Thus, although the pattern of thought seems traditional, the expression here may be original with Chaucer.

But the next example has a very definite literary tradition:

²⁷ Ibid., p. 178-9.

An ydole of fals portrayture
 Ys she /Fortune/, for she wol sone wrien;
 She is the monstres hed ywrien,
 As fylthe over-ystrawed with floures. (626-9)

Ever since Matthew recorded Our Lord's simile of the whited sepulchre (Mt. 23:27)--and probably much earlier--attempts have been made to find figures adequate to describe hypocrisy.

George Lyman Kittredge has located a passage in Machaut's eighth Motet which clearly resembles Chaucer's figure:

Une ydole est de fausse pourtraiture
 C'est fiens courvers de riche couverture
 Qui dehors luist et dedens est ordure. (9; 17-18)²⁸

In the same article, Kittredge cites enough correspondences of this kind to demonstrate convincingly that Chaucer was directly influenced by Machaut.

The next example, likewise a tirade against Fortune, is of a type found more frequently in the works of Chaucer's predecessors.

I lykne hyr to the scorpioun,
 That ys a fals, flaterynge beste;
 For with his hed he maketh feste,
 But al amydde hys flaterynge
 With hys tayle he wol styng
 And envenyme; and so wol she. (636-41)

Skeat has noted two interesting occurrences of this simile before Chaucer. One is from the Ancren Riwe:

²⁸ "Guillaume de Machaut and The Book of the Duchess," PMLA, Vol. 30, N.S. Vol. 23 (1915), p. 11.

The scoriun is ones cunnes wurm that haueth neb ase me seith, sumdel iliche ase wommon, and is neddre bihinden; maketh feir semblaunt and fiketh mit te heued, and stingeth mid te teile.²⁹

The other, likewise directed against woman rather than Fortune, Skeat traces to the Liber de Naturis Rerem, quoted in Vincent of Beauvais' Speculum Naturale, XXC, 160:

Scorpio blandum et quasi virgineum dicitur vultum habere, sed habet in cauda modosa yenenatum aculeum, quo pungit et inficit proximantem.³⁰

Fansler notes that although some editors, including Koepfel, have pointed out parallel passages in the Roman de la Rose,

as Chaucer more than once elsewhere likened false women to scorpions and appears to have had abundant literary and popular tradition to copy, it is unnecessary to look to the French as original.³¹

The next example of extended simile is one for which a counterpart may be found in Machaut:

I trowe hit cam me kyndely.
Paraunter I was therto most able,
As a whit wal or a table,
For hit ys redy to cacche and take
Al that men wil theryn make,
Whether so men will portraye or peynte;
Be the werkes never so queynte. (778-84)

Skeat in his notes credits Sandras with the discovery of this passage in the Remède de Fortune:

29 Skeat, I, 479.

30 Idem.

31 Fansler, Op. Cit., p. 93.

Car le droit estat d'innocence
 Ressemblent proprement la table
 Blanche, polie, qui est able
 A recevoir, sans nul contraire,
 Ce qu'on y veut peindre ou portraire.

Despite the fact that Chaucer substitutes the lover for innocence in the simile, Skeat comments: "The rime of table and able settles the point."³²

The final example is the one chosen by Fansler to demonstrate the impossibility of designating any one work as a source when dealing with purely conventional material. The knight's description of Blanche reads:

Among these ladyes thus echon,
 Soth to seyen y sawgh oon
 That was lyk noon of the route;
 For I dar swere, withoute doute,
 That as the someres sonne bryght
 Ys fairer, clerer, and hath more lyght
 Than any other planete in heven,
 The moone, or the sterres seven,
 For al the world so hadde she
 Surmountéd hem alle of beaute,
 Of maner, and of comlynesse . . . (817-27)

All the analogues which follow are pointed out by Fansler. He credits Lisi Cipriani³³ with citing the relevant passage from Guillaume de Lorris' picture of Courtesy:

El fu clere comme la lune
 Est avers les autres estoiles,
 Qui ne ressemblent que chandoiles.
 (RR. 1246-48)

32 Skeat, I, 482.

33 "Studies in the Influence of the Romance of the Rose on Chaucer," PMLA, Vol. 22 (1904).

To Professor Kittredge³⁴ Fansler gives credit for discovering the passage in Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne:

Si en choisi entre les autres une
 Qui, tout aussi com li solaus la lune
 Veint de clarte,
 Avoit ella les autres seurmonte
 De pris, d'onneur, de grace et de biaute. (286-90)

But, as Fansler points out, the same figure may be found, used in the same way, in German, Scandinavian, and Oriental literature. And he quotes from the Nibelungenlied the following passage:

Sam der liehte mane
 des scin so luterliche
 dem stuont si nu geliche
 des wart da wol gehoehet
 vor den sternen stat,
 ab den wolken gat,
 vor maneger frouwen guot
 den aieren heleden der muot.
 (Aventiure V, stanza 19)³⁵

A similar passage occurs in the Volsunga-Saga:

Gudrun had a daughter by Sigurd hight Swanhild; she was fairest of all women, eager-eyed as her father, so that few durst look under the brows of her; and as far did she excel other woman kind as the sun excels the other lights of heaven. (Chapter XI, Morris' translation, p. 151)³⁶

The earliest analogues traced by Fansler are two from the Arabian Nights:

34 "Chauceriana," Modern Philology, Vol. 7 (April, 1910).

35 Fansler, Op. Cit., p. 88.

36 Idem.

The women encompassed her; and appeared like stars;
she, in the midst of them, being as the moon when
the clouds have withdrawn from before it.³⁷

The bride came forward among the female slaves like
the moon among the stars, or the chief pearl among
the minor pearls of the string.³⁸

Fansler might have included another well known expression of this same idea--Homer's description of Nausicaa's surpassing all the other maidens in beauty as Artemis does the nymphs who surround her. (Odyssey, VI)

Sufficient evidence is furnished by the scholars who have studied the origins of the similes appearing in the Book of the Duchess to warrant the conclusion that Chaucer's employment of this figure was, in his earliest period of composition, entirely derivative. Very simply he incorporated into his descriptions, wherever he felt they were appropriate, conventional, time-sanctioned comparisons, quite in character with the persons speaking, and in the manner approved by the literary conventions of the day.

37 Idem.

38 Ibid., p. 88-9.

CHAPTER IV

SIMILE IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER'S SECOND PERIOD

The writings of Chaucer which Robinson assigns to the second period (1372-1380) are as follows:

Transitional works, partly of the French tradition, but showing the beginnings of Italian influence; The House of Fame; Saint Cecilia (the Second Nun's Tale); the tragedies afterward used for the Monk's Tale; Anelida; some of the lyrics.¹

1. The House of Fame.

Although casual comment often links the House of Fame with the Book of the Duchess because of their common metrical form and their use of the dream vision convention, a comparative study of the similes in the two works shows striking differences. In the later work, the House of Fame, for example, the image-making technique becomes more noticeably Dantean. Despite the immense difference in tone between the sublime Divina Commedia and the playful House of Fame, Chaucer and Dante may be seen to have grappled with similar problems in their respective works. Each had to translate into concrete imagery a unique personal vision which was in some way "other worldly." As W. P. Ker suggests when contrasting Dante's similes with those of Homer:

1 F. N. Robinson, Works, p. xxix.

[Dante's] object is to give clearness of detail to a personal narrative: hence the great number of similes which give the right, accurate description of a thing, and not a comparison with something else.²

The second type of simile discussed by Ker, which he suggests Dante may have derived from Provençal lyrical poets, is that in which the states and changes of mind of the protagonist are externalized in literary similes. Although Chaucer gives a clear impression of his bewilderment at several stages of his dream, he does not resort to the second type of Dantean simile to do so. However, the first type emerges as the characteristic simile of the House of Fame, both in the speech of the narrator and that of the eagle. While retaining at least a few stock phrases of comparison, the House of Fame gives an impression quite different from that of the Book of the Duchess in the use of simile; the more conventional, literary comparisons of the Roman give way to a far more functional method of delineation in which familiar sights, sounds, scientific facts, etc. serve as analogies to experiences otherwise inexplicable to those who have not shared the dream itself.

For purposes of examination, the House of Fame will be divided into three parts, not exactly corresponding with the divisions into books: 1) the narrator's account of his

2 "Historical Notes on the Similes of Dante," Essays in Medieval Literature, New York, Macmillan, p. 49.

dream up to the time of his meeting with eagle (I, 1-495); 2) the appearance of the eagle and his conversation with the narrator (I, 496 - II, 1090); 3) the narrator's account of his visit to the House of Fame itself (III). It will be seen that although the number of similes and comparisons used in the respective sections differs greatly, the method of using these figures remains remarkable constant.

In the first section the protagonist begins in a matter-of-fact tone with a conventional discussion of dreams, an invocation to the god of sleep, and a summary of the Aeneid as he saw it depicted in portraiture in the temple of glass. Unless the expression "as thou were wood" addressed to Juno be considered figurative, there is no example of simile or metaphorical comparison before the arrival of the eagle. Only then does the narrator, conscious that he is about to impart almost incredible information, affirm the truth of what he is about to say with the conventional phrase, "sooth as deth, certeyn." (I, 391). Thus Chaucer's first extensive use of epic source material emerges as succinct summary completely devoid of simile--naturally so, since visual depiction of the main events of Aeneas' story could not have included Virgil's ornamental departures from the story line in far-fetched analogies. Once the narrator becomes emotionally involved when recounting Aeneas' desertion of Dido and he places him in the company of six

other faithless lovers, but comparison with them is merely implied. Otherwise the rapid pace of narration and the familiar tone of the speaker in the first section preclude the use of even such similes as appear in the Book of the Duchess, wherein the knight, in a meditative and confiding mood, could in a leisurely way praise his beloved and rail against Fortune for depriving him of her. In this earlier work the speaker used few similes in his own voice, resorting to them only to facilitate visualization as in the case of the cave of Morpheus and the flowery countryside traversed before the hunt. In the later work, the speaker distinguishes himself by straightforward diction, so that the eagle's appraisal of him as a "lewed man," albeit a studious one, causes the reader to wonder if he lacks skill in rhetoric or merely prefers unadorned speech.

As soon as the speaker encounters the eagle, however, he feels obliged to use comparison with increasing frequency. The feathers of the bird, he says, "shon . . . as of gold" (II, 530), using a typical term of comparison, second only to sun as the conventional exemplar of brightness. Wonder at the beauty of the bird gives way to amazement at the way in which it swoops him up in flight and carries him along, "As lightly as I were a larke" (II, 546). This alliterative phrase, placing the lark in juxtaposition with the eagle, suggests, perhaps unconsciously, the fable of the lark who

won her wager that she could fly higher than the eagle. She merely held on to the larger bird until he had spent himself in flight; then she took off and flew a little higher. But in the House of Fame the passenger never outwits the eagle!

During the flight the speaker's first impressions contain implications of comparison without actual use of simile. He wonders whether Jove is to "stellyfye" him, thus mentally comparing himself with mythological characters who encountered such a fate; then he modestly refuses to identify himself with others to whom similar flights were accorded:

I neyther am Ennok, ne Elye,
Ne Romulus, ne Ganymede. (II, 588-9)

Later in the second section after the initial remarks of the eagle, the speaker paraphrases St. Paul, revealing a certain mental identification with him:

. . . Y wot wel y am here;
But wher in body or in gost
I not, ywys; but God, thou wost! (II, 980-2)

And he confesses that he thought of "Marcian ̄Martianus Capella⁷/ And eke on Anteclaudian," but in none of these cases is simile used.

It is the eagle who introduces, in the second part of the work, a more systematic use of comparison. Of the "rhetorical colors" in the speech of the eagle, Florence E. Teager has said:

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Imago, or comparison, is employed more frequently than any other figure in this group. Since the Eagle is explaining matters ostensibly unknown to his auditor, he evidences his skill in exposition in six instances through the use of analogy, or comparison.³

The six examples of comparison identified by Miss Teager are as follows:

And lyvest thus as an heremyte. (II, 659)

Mo discordes, moo jelousies,
Mo murmures, and moo novelries,
And moo dissymulacions,
And feyned reparacions;
And moo berdys in two houres
Withoute rasour or sisoures
Ymad, then greynes be of sondes; (II, 685-91)

And eke moo holdyng in hondes,
And also moo renovelaunces
Of olde forleten acqueyntaunces;
Mo love-dayes and acordes
Then on instrumentes be cordes; (II, 692-6)

And eke of loves moo eschaunges
Than ever cornes were in graunges,-- (II, 697-8)

For as flaumbe ys but lyghted smoke,
Ryght soo soun ys air ybroke. (II, 769-70)

The last example, II, 789-823, is the long comparison of sound waves to the concentric circles caused by throwing a stone into water.

³ "Chaucer's Eagle and the Rhetorical Colors," PMLA, Vol. 47 (1932), p. 417. Miss Teager equates imago with comparison, similitudo with simile. This is somewhat confusing to anyone familiar with H. Caplan's translation of Rhetorica ad Herennium wherein similitudo is translated as comparison and imago as simile.

In the first example the eagle seems conscious of the fact that in simile "the resemblance between the two things need not apply throughout, but must hold on the precise point of comparison."⁴ To his comparison of Geoffrey to a hermit he adds the remark, "although thyn abstynence ys lyte." As far as he is willing to admit, the only point of resemblance lies in the narrator's studious and solitary life.

The concept of multiplicity elicits the comparisons found in the second, third, and fourth examples listed above. The first of these, "moo . . . then greynes be of sondes," is similar to the phrase which appears in God's initial promises to Abram:

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth;
if any man be able to number the dust of the earth,
he shall be able to number thy seed also. (Gen.
13:16, Confraternity Edition)⁵

That which Chaucer likens to the grains of sand has elicited some interesting remarks on the part of editors. Skeat notes that to "make a beard," metaphorically used to denote an act

⁴ *Rhetorica ad Hèrennium*, ed. Harry Caplan, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1954, p. 377.

⁵ That the comparison was commonplace even when the Book of Genesis was written is evident from its repetition: "as the sand that is by the sea shore" (22:17); "thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth" (28:14); "multiply my seed like the sand of the sea" (32:12); "so great abundance of wheat, that it was equal to the sand of the sea" (41:49).

of deception, represents a literal translation of the French phrase "faire la barbe" which would call merely for the translation "to shave" or "to trim" the beard. The use of this expression to signify cheating, Skeat points out, is found in Boccaccio's Decameron:

Speaking of some exorbitant cheats, [Boccaccio] says that they applied themselves "non a radere ma a corticare huomini [not to shave men, but to scarify them]; and a little lower:-- "si a soavemente la barbiera saputo menare il rasoio" [so agreeably did the she-barber know how to handle the razor].
(VIII, 10)^{5b}

The use of "cordes" on instruments as a term of comparison signifying multiplicity has given rise to some interesting discussion. The modern word "chord" seems to fit into the context, but historically this interpretation has been proved untenable. James B. Colvert points out that

since no concept of musical chords as a theoretical device in music existed in Chaucer's time, the poet could not possibly have meant anything but "cordes" in the sense of "strings."⁶

Because the music of the fourteenth century was essentially polyphonic, rather than harmonic, in structure, Colvert explains, Chaucer would not even have thought of clusters of tones as musical entities. Other contexts in which the word "cords" appears indicate that Chaucer must have been

^{5b} Skeat, III, 258.

⁶ "A Reference to Music in Chaucer's House of Fame," Modern Language Notes, Vol. 69 (April, 1954), p. 240.

referring to instruments such as the bass lute which had a total of twenty-four strings, the kind of harp to which Machaut alludes--one with twenty-five strings--or the harp mentioned by Huon de Bordeaux with thirty strings.⁷ In this instance the simile was appropriate as intended by Chaucer, but it has become far more effective with the additional connotations of harmony which have since accrued.

The last two examples represent attempts of the eagle to argue by analogy, to explain the unknown by the known. The manner is scientifically objective in tone, ostensibly persuasive. So apparent to the eagle is the truth of his statement that flame is lighted smoke that he assumes acquiescence on the part of his hearer and, without exploring whether the relationship may be validly transferred, he merely affirms that the same relationship exists between air and sound. The other example he pursues at length (without, however, giving credit to his sources). According to Skeat,

The illustration is a good one; I have no doubt that it is obtained directly or at secondhand from Boethius. Vincent of Beauvais, *Spec. Nat. lib. XXV*, c. 58, says:--"Ad quod demonstrandum inducit idem Boetius tale exemplum: Lapis proiectus in medio stagni facit breuissimum circulum, et ille alium, et hoc fit donec vel ad ripas peruenerit vel impetus defecerit."⁸

7 *Idem.*

8 Skeat, III, 260.

Then Skeat proceeds to quote the original passage, a lengthy one, from Boethius' De Musica, lib.1, c. 14. In the eagle's version, Chaucer inserts the homely phrase of comparison "brod as a covercle ∟pot-lid∟," subtly reminding the reader of the limitations, real or alleged, which the eagle finds in his student who must have concepts translated into the most familiar terms.

Besides these six examples of comparison, Miss Teager identifies two examples of simile⁹ in the eagle's speech:

And also dumb as any stone
Thou sittest at another bok. (II, 656-7)¹⁰

⁹ It is difficult to discover any essential difference between these two examples and the six examples of comparison cited above. Simile, according to the treatise ad Herennium, is "the comparison of one figure with another, implying a certain resemblance between them." Apparently Miss Teager sees in the first example a real comparison of two figures--the narrator and a stone--rather than a mere carrying over of one element of likeness--that of dumbness. But it is in examining an example like this that one realizes how thin is the line between true simile and "mere comparison." If this passage be admitted as simile, it would seem that all the phrases, such as "still as stone," even those used obviously for padding, should be included. Yet these conventional expressions by dint of repetition have admittedly lost their forcefulness. Thus the essence of simile must lie deeper than merely verbal structure, perhaps residing in the imaginative evocation which accompanies the comparison, causing the reader to visualize, rather than merely to note, a point of similarity.

¹⁰ Cf. Roman, 2409-10, describing a lover as

Domm as a ston, without steryng
Of fot or hond, without spekyng.

And mo loves casuelly
 That been betid, no man wot why,
 But as a blind man start an hare. (II, 679-81)

In the second example the proverbial simile, strictly speaking, compares situations rather than figures; the element of likeness is inadvertence. Skeat explains this passage as

alluding to sudden fallings in love, especially 'at first sight.' Such take place at haphazard; as if a blind man should accidentally frighten a hare without the least intending it.¹¹

Much of the effect of humor created by the eagle's speech is realized at the point of his boasting that he has successfully instructed Geoffrey without resorting to the "colours of rhetorik." But once he has given the example, the narrator, allegedly a "lewed man," follows suit and makes use of comparison throughout the third section of the work.

The narrator's apprenticeship in the use of this figure is fostered by the eagle. As they approach the house of Fame, the bird inquires if he can hear the sounds which emerge from it. Geoffrey's answer is a simple affirmative: "Yis, parde! . . . wel ynogh." Only when the eagle presses him to describe it by asking "And what soun is it lyk?" does the narrator begin to find analogies. From then on he needs no further prompting from the eagle.

¹¹ Skeat, III, 257-8.

Peter! lyk betynge of the see,
 . . . ayen the roches holowe,
 Whan tempest doth the shippes swalowe;
 And lat a man stonde, out of doute,
 A myle thens, and here hyt route;
 Or elles lyk the last humblynge
 After the clappe of a thundringe,
 When Joves hath the air ybete. (II, 1034-41)

In neither of these comparisons is the narrator content with stating the minimum resemblance; in the first instance he qualifies his initial statement to express the muted quality distinguishing this particular rumbling sound; in the second he employs mythological allusion to add significance to the cause of his fear. But appropriate and spontaneous as these comparisons appear at first reading, they closely reproduce a passage of Ovid discovered by Warton and reprinted by Skeat:

Nec tamen est clamor, sed parvae murmura vocis;
 qualia de pelagi, si quis procul audiat undis
 esse solent: qualemve sonum, quum Iupiter atras
 increpuit nubes, extrema tonitrua reddunt.
 (Met. XII, 49-52)¹²

In visually measuring the distance between the house of Fame and themselves, the narrator uses a comparison which has a Dantean flavor, but which is already a commonplace in the New Testament.

And with this word both he and y
 As nygh the place aryved were
 As men may casten with a spere. (II, 1046-8)

¹² Skeat, III, 266.

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In describing the Agony in the Garden, St. Luke uses the expression, "He withdrew from them about a stone's throw" (22:41). Parallel expressions may be found in the Inferno and the Purgatorio:

and at the distance of a crossbow shot
we found another giant larger and fiercer.
(Inf. XXXI, 83-4)

These people were still as far off--
I mean after a thousand steps of ours--
as a good slinger could throw. (Purg. III, 67-9)

When at the beginning of Book III the dreamer approaches the house he feels obliged to use many comparisons to convey as explicitly as possible what he sees. The initial imagery is entirely visual; only afterwards does he describe sounds as well. The things which most impress him about the exterior of the castle are its location, its brightness, and the number of its windows. The appearance of the rock upon which the castle stands proves deceptive:

For hyt was lyk alum de glas,
But that hyt shoon ful more clere. (III, 1124-5)

But later it is identified as "A roche of yse, and not of stel." (III, 1130) This can hardly be classed as figurative comparison; the effort of the narrator is to render as exactly as possible what he sees. The second comparison, however, seems to be genuine simile:

. . . and ful eke of wyndowes,
As flakes falle in grete snowes. (III, 1191-2)

Although Skeat deliberates whether to consider the verb falle as a verb in the present tense or as a past participle, the former choice seems the more appropriate. Only at the time of falling do snowflakes create the impression of great multiplicity. Thus the likening of innumerable windows to snowflakes in a blizzard seems quite successful. The phrase itself is purely conventional, as has already been seen by its frequent appearance in Layamon's Brut.¹³

Outside the castle the dreamer hears and sees numerous minstrels. Some he recognizes and names; others he describes by the type of music they render or by the instruments upon which they play. Finally, he finds it impossible to do justice to the number of performers and he resorts to the use of occupatio to make a graceful conclusion:

There saugh I sitte in other sees,
 Playinge upon sondry gleees,
 Whiche that I kan not nevene,
 Moo than sterres ben in hevене,
 Of which I nyl'as now not ryme,
 For ese of yow, and los of tyme. (III, 1251-6)

The comparison, "Moo than sterres ben in hevене," like the "dust of the earth" image discussed above, has been traditional at least since the recording of God's promise to Abraham.

Look up to heaven, and number the stars if
 thou canst So shall thy seed be. (Gen.15:5)

¹³ For example: "First they let fly, exceedingly quick, darts all as thick as the snow down falleth!" (l. 253)

In the Scriptural context the concept of numerous progeny is made more explicit by comparison to something at least partly visual; in Chaucer, the visual impression of the numerous minstrels is compared to the same referend, but in this case the effect is a movement towards conceptualization. This example demonstrates what happens as an image becomes stereotyped.

Whenever the speaker becomes stymied at the gigantic task of literal presentation, he merely invokes the superlative in comparison, often in conjunction with a phrase embodying the use of occupatio. The magnificent hall, for example, proves beyond adequate description: "Loo! how shulde I now telle al thys?" Not only is it "plated half a foote thikke/ Of gold" (III, 1345-6), but that gold is "as fyn as ducat in Venyse." (III, 1348) Here the connotations of brilliance as well as of unalloyed purity emerge to enhance the conventional idea of gold as the standard of brightness. But the dreamer retains his contact with the more prosaic world by adding parenthetically in regard to the Venetian ducats, "Of which to lite al in my pouche is" (III, 1349). This transitional aside also prepares for a humorous rime in the next line which begins another extravagant description:

And they were set as thik of nouchis
 Ful of the fynest stones faire,
 That men rede in the Lapidaire,
 As grasses growen in a mede. (III, 1350-3)

Here again the comparison is completely conventional, evoking more the concept of multiplicity than any distinctive visual image.

In the description of the Goddess of Fame herself, a series of comparisons is used:

For as feele eyen hadde she
 As fetheres upon foules be,
 Or weren on the bestes foure
 That Goddis trone gunne honoure,
 As John writ in th'Apocalips.
 Hir heer, that oundy was and crips,
 As burned gold hyt shoon to see;
 And, soth to tellen, also she
 Had also fele upstondyng eres
 And tonges, as on bestes heres; (III, 1381-90)

Despite the setting of grandeur in which the goddess is placed and the one comparison of hair "like burned gold," the picture which emerges is grotesque to say the least. That Fame should give the impression of being all eyes, ears, and tongues is most appropriate, but the poet seems to feel obliged to mitigate the ludicrous effect. Dante had used the language of the Apocalypse to describe the four creatures, the Gospels, in Purgatorio, XXIX, 92 ff., and had there likened their eyes to those of Argus. Chaucer makes no mythological allusion, but he uses a more familiar comparison, "as fetheres upon foules be." The Biblical allusion forbids reading the passage as humorous, whereas comparison of such a majestic figure with birds and beasts ordinarily would tend to lower the dignity of the subject thus compared. Naturally

the casual reader wonders how such multiplicity of eyes, ears, and tongues could exist on one creature and what arrangement the various organs assumed. The vague sense of confusion evoked is probably just what Chaucer intended. The comparison of hair "like burned gold" keeps the goddess in focus as resembling the traditionally beautiful woman. It is interesting to note, however, in connection with this phrase that Walter Clyde Curry, who has studied in detail the conventional expressions describing feminine beauty in the Middle Ages,¹⁴ states that nowhere outside of Chaucer has he discovered this term of comparison. The verb burnen, with its participle burned (burnished, polished) would seem to have been an obvious word to modify gold in a line requiring two extra syllables, but Chaucer seems to have been the only one to discover its use.

The phrase "lyk as he were wood," which appears so often in Chaucer's work and that of his contemporaries, is ordinarily unworthy of any special mention. However, in the following context scholars have found explicit meaning:

And next him on a piler stood
 Of soulfre, lyk as he were wood,
 Daun Claudian, the sothe to telle,
 That bar up al the fame of helle,

¹⁴ The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty; as Found in the Metrical Romances, Chronicles, and Legends of the XIII, XIV, and XV Centuries, Baltimore, J. H. Furst Co., 1916, p. 15, n. 10.

Of Pluto, and of Proserpyne,
That quene ys of the derke pyne. (III, 1507-12)

Professor E. F. Shannon, in commenting on this passage, quotes Professor Lounsbury:

'Like as he were wood' is an expression, which, common as it is in Chaucer may be thought to show here his appreciation of the fervor and fire, and rhetorical diction which modern critics have regarded as special characteristics of Claudian's style. On the other hand, it is possible that he may have had in mind the fierce invectives against Eutropius and Rufinius. (Studies in Chaucer, II, 255)¹⁵

Shannon's own observation would make the allusion even more specific:

I think it is much more likely that Claudian's own words near the beginning of the De Raptu Proserpinae (i, 4-6) furnished the suggestion for the epithet. There the poet says the divine madness, which is upon him, has removed from his breast all human sensibilities:

. . . . gressus removete profani
Jam furor humanos nostro de pectore sensus
Expulit et totum spirant praecordis Phoebum.¹⁶

Although danger of over-interpretation exists, it is entirely possible that Chaucer might have enjoyed loading a cliché with real significance for the benefit of those who shared his acquaintanceship with the works of Claudian.

The "bee simile" has been part of western literary tradition at least since its use by Virgil, but it is likely that Dante's example prompted Chaucer to incorporate it into the passage in which the dreamer describes the sounds emerging from Fame's house:

¹⁵ Chaucer and the Roman Poets, Cambridge, 1929, p. 357

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 357-8.

But while that y beheld thys syghte,
 I herde a noyse aprochen blyve,
 That ferde as been don in an hive
 Ayen her tyme of out-fleyng;
 Ryght such a maner murmuryng,
 For al the world, hyt semed me. (III, 1520-25)

Skeat cites the parallel passage in Inferno, XVI, 1:

Now came I where the water's din was heard
 Resounding like the hum of swarming bees,
 When forth together issued from a troop. (Tr. Cary)¹⁷

When Eolus is summoned to obey Fame's order to attend with his trumpets that he may herald forth her arbitrary judgements, he is described in his traditional role as keeper of the winds. So hard does he press them, the dreamer says, "That they gone as beres rore" (III, 1589). No comment is offered by editors on this comparison; it seems commonplace and unimportant, as does the next description of Eolus himself standing before Fame "still as stone." There seems no reason to connect the dreamer and Eolus thematically because they share the same terms of comparison--one as dumb, the other as still. While perhaps meaningful in the earlier context, the phrase seems to be mere padding, except insofar as the instrument of Fate must be seen as utterly passive to emphasize the fact that man's praise or blame rests uniquely in her hands.

17 Skeat, III, 279.

Although nine different groups present themselves before Fame, only two basic kinds of judgement are passed, to which correspond the sounds from Eolus' two trumpets, Clere Laude and Sklaundre. The dreamer describes the heralding forth of the judgements accorded the second and third groups, using vivid comparisons appealing to the different senses to emphasize the contrast. The second company, made up of "goode folk," undeservedly receive "a shrewed fame/ And wikkyd loos, and worse name" (III, 1619-20), trumpeted forth on Sklaundre. Within twenty lines appear five phrases of comparison, making vivid the horrible sight and sound issuing from the trumpet of Eolus.

What dide this Eolus, but he
 Tok out hys blake trumpe of bras,
 That fouler than the devel was,
 And gan this trumpe for to blowe,
 As al the world shulde overthrowe,
 That throughtout every regioun
 Wente this foule trumpes soun,
 As swifte as pelet out of gonne,
 Whan fyr is in the poudre ronne.
 And such a smoke gan out wende
 Out of his foule trumpes ende,
 Blak, bloo, grenyssh, swartish red,
 As doth where that men melte led,
 Loo, al on high fro the tuel.
 And therto oo thing saugh I wel,
 That the ferther that hit ran,
 The gretter wexen hit began,
 As dooth the ryver from a welle,
 And hyt stank as the pit of helle.
 Allas, thus was her shame yronge,
 And gilteless, on every tonge! (III, 1636-56)

Like Dante and other medieval voyagers to unearthly regions, Chaucer is not content with merely visual imagery. That which emerges to represent slander gives an impression of

infernally ugly appearance, rapid impact, immense growth, and rank odor. Even if the phrase "fouler than the devel" were not explicitly used, the atmosphere of hell would be unmistakable in the imagery. Each of the phrases singles out a particular element of likeness: "fouler than the devel," "swifte as pelet out of gonne," smoke colored like that which emerges from a lead furnace, growth in volume like a river flowing, and odor foul "as the pit of helle." The accumulated effect is that of genuine simile, the two figures of comparison being the concrete visualization of Slander and the traditional medieval representation of hell. Spencer's contention that Chaucer's concept of hell is derived less from Dante than from the popular medieval "vision" literature seems valid in this connection. Spencer points out that the idea of hell as characterized by foul odor derives not from the classical authors but rather from medieval writers.¹⁸

Besides the well known Dantean passage,

On the edge of a high bank
 formed by a circle of broken rocks
 we stood above a more cruel pack;
 and here because of the horrible stench
 which the deep abyss exhales
 we approached behind the cover of a great tomb...
(Inferno, XI, 1-6)¹⁹

¹⁸ "Chaucer's Hell: A Study in Mediaeval Convention," Speculum, Vol. 2 (April, 1927), p. 177.

¹⁹ The Divine Comedy, tr. H. R. Huse, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1954, p. 55.

Spencer cites from St. Patrick's Purgatory a passage telling of Sir Owayn's coming to "a deep water . . . that foule stank"²⁰ and of St. Brendan's arriving at a "land deark i-noug,/ Smoke stynkinde foule."²¹ From still another work he quotes a passage in which St. Paul is overcome by the stench of the infernal pit:

Et tele puor en issi
Que soz ciel n'est heume né
Ki sace dire la vérité.²²

Tyndale too observes on the brink of hell

soubitement si grant horreur et si grant froit et
si grant pueur et tenebres et tribulations et
angoisse si grant que il astoit avis a l'ame que
tous li fondemens de la terre tranbloit sous ses
pies . . . [The wretched soul could not move]
pour la tres grant puor qu'ele sentoit.²³

To balance stylistically the description of Sklaun-dre's trumpeting, the passage describing the praise issuing from the golden trumpet that "highte Laude" includes phrases of comparison. However, evil is always easier to depict vividly by analogy; the comparisons chosen for good repute are less effective as imagery.

20 Spencer, Op. Cit., p. 192.

21 Idem.

22 Spencer's note: "Printed in A. F. Ozanam, Etudes sur les Sources Poétiques de le Divine Comédie (Paris, 1845), p. 111, vv. 198 ff."

23 Ibid., p. 192.

And out hys trompe of gold he brayde
 Anon, and sette hyt to his mouth,
 And blew it est, and west, and south,
 And north, as lowde as any thunder,
 That every wight hath of hit wonder,
 So brode hyt ran, or than hit stente.
 And, certes, al the breth that wente
 Out of his trumpes mouth it smelde
 As men a pot of baume helde
 Among a basket ful of roses.
 This favour dide he til her loses. (III,1678-88)

The trumpeting in all directions may suggest the summoning of the angel at the end of the world, but the phrase "lowde as any thunder," seems to add nothing to the idea of beauty which might be expected to contrast with the sounds coming from Sklaundre. Only one comparison is directly appropriate, but the combination of balm and roses somewhat resembles the traditional coals brought to Newcastle. Either would have been sufficient--balm because of its symbolic use in the Canticle of Canticles in phrases now associated with the Office of Our Lady; roses because of their traditional symbolism, especially after the popularity of the Roman de la Rose. The cumulative effect of this passage, although less powerful than that of the one depicting evil repute, is adequate to provide the needed symmetry.

By contrast, no metaphorical comparisons are used in telling of the judgements passed upon the next three groups. The seventh, however, whose plea is openly for undeserved fame, merits invective and a proverbial simile:

For ye be lyke the sweynte cat
 That wolde have fissh; but wostow what?
 He wolde nothing wete his clowes. (III, 1783-5)

In Early English Proverbs Skeat cites parallels in Latin, German, and English:

"Catus amat piscem, sed non vult tinger plantam."

"Die Katze hatt' der Fische gern; aber sie will die Füsse nit nass machen."

"The cat doth love the fishe, but she will not wett her foote." (Reliquae Antiquae 1, 207)

He also reprints from Ray the French version:

"Le chat aime le poisson, mais il n'aime pas a mouiller la patte."²⁴

Haeckel quotes a version from Hislop, Proverbs of Scotland:

"Like the cat, fain fish wad ye eat, but ye are laith to weet your feet."²⁵

The derision merited by this group finds expression not only in the proverbial simile, but also in a passage containing three phrases of comparison:

This Eolus anon up sterte,
 And with his blake clarioun
 He gan to blasen out a soun
 As lowde as beloweth wynd in helle;
 And eke therwith, soth to telle,
 This soun was so ful of japes,
 As ever mowes were in apes,
 And that wente al the world aboute,
 That every wight gan on hem shoute,
 And for to lawghe as they were wod,
 Such game fonde they in her hod. (III, 1800-10)

²⁴ Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1910, No. 209, p. 88.

²⁵ Das Sprichwort bei Chaucer, Erlangen, Junge & Sohn, 1890, No. 31, p. 9.

The phrase "lowde as beloweth wynd in helle" picks up the theme of the first description of Sklaundre's sound. Spencer points out that although wind in hell was commonplace, the "bellowing" wind was less often mentioned. Dante's wind "which roars like the sea in a tempest/ when beaten by conflicting winds (Inf. V, 29-30) is believed by Lowes to be Chaucer's source and that he translated Dante's muggia by the word "bellowing." But Spencer cites a passage from the Ayenbite of Inwit which shows that the idea was not unique in Dante: "[/In hell there is/ ver berynde, brenstone stinkinde, tempeste brayinde, voule dyevlen, honger, and porst."²⁶ The "soun . . . ful of japes" has more than mere multiplicity in common with the "mowes [grimaces] . . . in apes"; the term of comparison extends beyond the literal and causes the reader to see the foolish suitors who merit such judgement compared to the apes by implication. The last phrase, the conventional "to laughe as they were wod," seems to cut both ways, applying literally to those deriding, but connotatively extending to those who are the butt of their scorn. Cumulatively, the images create an effective analogy to the derision meted out by Fame to the pretentious.

After leaving the castle, the dreamer, again escorted by the eagle, approaches the house of tidings, which

26 Spencer, Op. Cit., p. 193.

is described as more wonderful than the labyrinth of Daedalus and therefore, by implication, not unlike it. The first impression he receives is one of incessant movement:

. . . as swyft as thought,
This queynte hous about wente,
That never mo hyt still stente. (III, 1926-8)

The phrase "swift as thought" is appropriate to dream imagery if commonplace. The noise which the dreamer describes is put into imagery which corresponds to the example above in which distance is measured in terms of weapons being hurled.

And therout com so gret a noyse
That, hat hyt stonden upon Oyse,
Men myghte hyt han herd esely
To Rome, ye trowe sikerly. (III, 1927-30)

The Oyse is a river which flows into the Seine near Paris. Robinson has drawn the obvious conclusion: "It was doubtless chosen here for the rime."

In an attempt to clarify his impression, the dreamer describes the noise as follows:

For al the world, ryght so hyt ferde,
As dooth the rowtynge of the ston
That from th'engyn ys leten gon. (III, 1932-4)

A similar comparison occurs in Ovid's Metamorphoses when he describes Lichas' being seized and whirled around by the furious Hercules:

But pleading, clasping still, by Hercules
Was seized, and swung three times or more, and
whirled,
Like stone by war's impetuous engine hurled,
Into Euboean seas . . .²⁷

27 XI, tr. Watts, p. 198.

SIMILES IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER'S SECOND PERIOD

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More specifically focussed upon sound is the parallel cited by Skeat in his note:

This is an excellent and picturesque allusion, but in these days can no longer be appreciated. Compare Barbour's Bruce, XVII, 681:--

The engnour than deliuerly
Gert bend the gyne in full gret hy,
And the stane smertly swappit out.
It flaw out, quhedirand, with a rout.²⁸

Literally, the house appears to the dreamer to resemble baskets woven of "twigges, falwe, rede,/ And grene eke." The great number of openings is described by the commonplace comparison:

As fele as of leves ben in trees
In somer, whan they grene been; (III, 1946-7)

And the shape of the whole house is literally "lyk a cage."

Its constuction gives no promise of endurance, but the dreamer knows that it will remain as long as it pleases

Aventure,

That is the moder of tydynges,
As the sea of welles and of sprynges;
(III, 1983-4)

There is a double simile implied here, or rather, a simile and a metaphor at the same time. The sea is likened to a mother in her relationship to smaller bodies of water; she is their source and origin. In the same way, Aventure, chance, or fortune is seen to be the mother of tidings or

²⁸ Skeat, III, 284.

rumors. The implication of fertility of which the sea is a traditional symbol applies equally to the other term of the comparison.

The rapidity with which tidings travel has always been a commonplace, sometimes personified as Rumor. The natural comparison which suggests itself by way of parallel is the rapidity with which fire spreads. Ovid used fire imagery picturing rural scenes, as for example when describing the passion of Tereus as fire:

Tereus took fire, and fierce his passion blazed,
Like kindled hay or stubble, as he gazed.²⁹

Or again, the rapacity of Erysichthon finds its counterpart in fire:

As fire, devouring countless logs, will spurn
No fuel, while there's fuel yet to burn;
And more rapacious, as you strive to feed,
With greater plenty shows the greater greed,
So the blasphemer, eating without pause,
Cried out for food with food between his jaws.³⁰

A third instance of Ovid's use of fire imagery occurs in the description of Rhoetus striking the brow of Charaxus with a blazing plum-tree bough:

And like a field of sun-dried wheat, his hair
Seized by the ravening flame, was set aflare;³¹

29 Metamorphoses, VI, tr. Watts, p. 130.

30 Ibid., VIII, p. 189.

31 Ibid., XII, p. 273.

If Chaucer was indeed recalling the frequent use of fire by Ovid, he urbanized the image for his comparison:

As fyr ys wont to quyke and goo
From a sparke spronge amys,
Til al a citee brent up ys. (III, 2078-80)

Reputation determined by Fame's arbitrary decisions is likened to the waxing and waning of the moon. Chaucer's use of this time-worn comparison is less complex than that found in the Roman, in which love that "comth of dame Fortune" is seen to resemble the moon in eclipse:

For it shal chaungen wonder soone,
And take eclips, right as the moone,
Whanne she is from us lett
Thurgh erthe, that bitwixe is sett
The sonne and hir, as it may fall,
Be it in partie, or in all. (Rom., 5333-38)³²

Chaucer refers merely to the ordinary phenomenon when he says

Some to wexe and wane sone,
As doth the faire white mone (III, 2215-6)

but the context calls for no further elaboration.

Among the bearers of tidings the dreamer sees:

O, many a thousand tymes twelve
. . . of these pardoners,
Currours, and eke messagers,
With boystes crammed ful of lyes
As ever vessel was with lyes. (III, 2126-30)

The irony of using this number applied to such characters is immediately apparent. However, the simile of boxes crammed with lies, as ever vessel was with dregs or sediment, is apparently introduced for the play of words and the rime riche.

32 Robinson, p. 615.

The final simile describes the rush of men to hear love tidings:

And whan they were alle on an hepe,
 Tho behynde begunne up lepe,
 And clamben up on other faste,
 And up the nose and yen kaste,
 And troden fast on others heles,
 And stampen, as men doon aftir eles. (III, 2149-54)

For the last line of this quotation Robinson supplies a long and interesting explanation:

"And stamp as men do in trying to catch eels." Editors have in general refrained from commenting on this line, either because its meaning seems clear or because the custom was familiar. But Professor Magoun has had the curiosity to collect instances of catching eels by "stamping" or by "treading," and the editor is indebted to him for the following references. From Dr. Alfred C. Redfield of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution he cites the information, on the testimony of Mr. Harold Backus, chief engineer at Woods Hole, that the custom still exists in Norfolk Broads, England, where the term for treading is "stomping." Mr. Jan Halin, of the publicity department at Woods Hole, testifies that the fishermen in the Zuider Zee have a similar method of driving eels into nets. The one published reference Mr. Magoun has found is in Mourt's Relation or Journal of the Plymouth Plantation (ed. H. M. Dexter, Boston, 1865, p. 97) where Squanto (an Indian) is described as treading eels out with his feet.³³

But the value of the simile arises not only from the visualization of action but especially from the traditional characteristics of the eel itself which suggests connotatively the slippery quality of love tidings. Whether the tale was purposely left unfinished for diplomatic reasons or not,

33 Robinson, p. 788.

the conclusion has proved evasive enough in meaning to all Chaucer scholars that the final simile seems eminently appropriate.

2. Saint Cecilia (The Second Nun's Tale).

In the prologue to the Second Nun's Tale Chaucer acknowledges that the work is a translation rather than an original composition.

For bothe have I the wordes and sentence
Of hym that at the seintes reverence
The storie wroot, and folwen hire legende. (81-3)

The "hym" alluded to, according to G. H. Gerould who contributed the section on this tale to Sources and Analogues, is probably the "Frater Jacobus Januensis" who is credited with the etymological explanation of Cecilia's name. At least as far as line 357, Gerould believes that Chaucer used his version of the Legenda Aurea; he may have had a supplementary source for the rest which does not coincide quite as precisely. It is only natural, then, that there is no apparent originality in Chaucer's use of simile in this work, although he could conceivably have introduced examples of this figure in fitting his translation into metered verse. Probably one or two short phrases of comparison represent such original insertion; the others are all to be found in the Latin Legenda. These are, for the most part, of the type traditional in homiletic and other didactic literature.

No similes occur in the initial passages of the prologue; only the last stanza traces a comparison in connection with Cecilia's name:

And right so as thise philosophres write
That hevne is swift and round and eek brennynge,
Right so was faire Cecilia the white
Ful swift and bisy evere in good werkyng,
And round and hool in good perseveryng,
And brennyng evere in charite ful brighte,
Now have I yow declared what she highte. (113-9)

Robinson summarizes in his notes the various interpretations given by Jacobus Januensis which Chaucer adopted:

(1) "coeli lilia," hevenes lilie; (2) "caecis via," way to blynde; (3) "caelo et lya," hevne and Lia (representative of the active life), (4) "caecilia quasi caecitate carens," wantyng of blyndnesse (on the principle, "lucus a non lucendo"); (5) "coelo et leos" . . . hevne of people.³⁴

Following Skeat, Robinson points out that Chaucer has transferred to the fifth derivation the Latin explanation which belongs to the third. Skeat quotes the passage from the original:

Vel dicitur coelum, quia, sicut dicit Ysidorus, coelum philosophi uolubile, rotundum et ardens esse dixerunt. Sic et ipsa fuit uolubilis per operationem sollicitam, rotunda per perseuerantiam, ardens per caritatem succensam.³⁵

The element of burning, according to Skeat, refers to the tenth sphere called empyraeum (from the Greek word for

³⁴ Robinson, p. 757.

³⁵ Skeat, V, 408.

burning) "where the pure element of fire subsisted alone; and it was supposed to be the abode of saints and angels."

The first phrase of simile which occurs in the story itself is a homely one, not found in the Latin source.

Lo, lyk a bisy bee, withouten gile,
Thee serveth ay thyn owene thral Cecile. (195-6)

The use of the bee simile, as noted above, was traditional, going back at least to the Aeneid as a symbol of diligence: "Quales apes aestate nova per florea rura, / Exercet sub sole labor."³⁶

The next two phrases of simile, even more commonplace, appear in the Latin original. Chaucer writes:

For thilke spouse that she took but now
Ful lyk a fiers leoun, she sendeth heere,
As meke as evere was any lomb, to yow! (197-9)

The Legenda at this point reads as follows: "Nam sponsum, quem quasi leonem ferocem accepit ad te quasi agnum mansuetissimum destinavit."³⁷ The lamb simile, as will be seen later, finds its way into almost all the Saints' legends in Chaucer.

Although perhaps too literal to be treated as metaphorical comparison, the phrase "as dead fil doun for drede" is also taken from the Latin original: "Quem uidens Ualerianus prae nimio timore quasi mortuus cecidit, et a sene leuatus sic legit."³⁸

³⁶ I, 430-1.

³⁷ Sources and Analogues, p. 672.

³⁸ Idem.

The next simile, typically in the homiletic tradition, is based on the original but somewhat changed in translation.

Chaucer writes:

"That shal I telle," quod she, "er I go,
Right as a man hath sapiences three,
Memorie, engyn, and intellect also,
So in o beynge of divinitee,
Three persones may ther right wel bee." (337-41)

Robinson notes a slight lack of correspondence to the Latin: "Sicut in una hominis sapientia sunt tria, scilicet, ingenium, memoria et intellectus . . ." Chaucer's version is close enough to be a translation of what was apparently a traditional simile belonging to the legend in its various versions; it appears likewise in Aelfric's Lives:

for-þan-þe faeder . and sunu . and se frofer gast
an gecynd habbaþ . and aenne cyne-dom . swa swa
on anum men synd soþlice þreo þing . andgit and
wylla . and gewittig gemynd . þe anum men ge-
hyrsumiaþ aefre togaedere.
("because Father and Son and the Comforting Spirit
have one nature and one kingdom; even as in one
man are verily three things; understanding, and
will, and conscious memory, which together ever
belong to one man.")³⁹

The simile invoked by Cecilia to deflate the boasting Almachius is taken from the Legenda and found also in the early English versions.

"Youre myght," quod she, "ful litel is to dreede
For every mortal mannes power nys

³⁹ Aelfric's Lives of Saints, ed. W. W. Skeat, E. E. T. S. O.S. /114, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., p. 374-6.

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But lyk a bladdre ful of wynd, ywys.
 For with a nedles poynt, whan it is blowe,
 May al the boost of it be leyd ful lowe." (437-41)

The Latin text at this point reads:

Potestas uestra est quasi uter uento repletus, quem
 si acus pupugerit omnis protinus rigor pallefcit,
 et quidquid in se rigidum habere cernitur incurua-
 tor.⁴⁰

In his notes Skeat quotes an analogue from the South English
 Legendary:

For it nis bote a bladre i-blowe ful of a wreche
 wynde;
 Be it with a litel prikke i-priked, a-wey it
 shrinketh al.⁴¹

Aelfric's version is as follows:

. . . and þæt maeden him cwaep to
 Ic secge gif þu haetst hwilce mihte þu haefst
 Aelces mannes miht þe on modignysse faerþ
 ic soþlice þam gelic swilce man siwige
 ane bytten . and blawe hi fulle windes .
 and wyrce sibban an þyrl þonne heo to-þunden biþ
 on hire greatnysse þonne togaep seo miht. (313 ff.)

(. . . And the maiden said to him:
 "I will say, if thou biddest me, what sort of might
 thou hast,
 Every man's might who walketh in pride
 is verily like as if a man should sew up
 a bladder, and blow it full of wind,
 and afterward make a hole, when it is puffed out,
 then, in its greatness, the might departeth."⁴²)

The last example of comparison occurs in a line
 which Skeat describes as "wholly Chaucer's own":

⁴⁰ Sources and Analogues, p. 676.

⁴¹ Skeat, V, 412.

⁴² Ed. Skeat, p. 374-5.

I recche nat what wrong that thou me profre,
For I kan suffre it as a philosophre. (489-90)

Whether he meant the word in its etymological sense, in which case Cecilia could truly be seen as a "lover of wisdom," or whether he had in mind the kind of resignation offered by philosophy to Boethius, the phrase is simple enough to be accepted on a literal level.

Thus it would appear that the only phrase which Chaucer introduced in the line of simile is the conventional "busy as a bee"--all the rest of his similes were already in the source material and retained in the versified translation later assigned to the Second Nun.

3. The Monk's Prologue and Tale.

Despite the fact that the Monk holds the floor for a considerable time as he narrates his seventeen "tragedies" of varying lengths, his narrative technique is exceptionally direct throughout. Similes appear only rarely, and the few which are used are either utterly conventional phrases or are obviously inserted for purposes of rime.

In the Prologue (which probably belongs to a later period than the tale itself) the Host explains that at the bidding of his wife he must be "lik a wilde leoun, fool-hardy" or he is lost. Although the phrase is a cliché, the irony of its use by the hen-pecked husband here is humorous.

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The chief sources upon which Chaucer relied for material in writing these tragedies were the historical books of Holy Scripture and certain tales of Boccaccio. In both cases Chaucer found his models written in a forthright narrative style, unembellished by purely decorative figures of speech. In Chapters 13-16 of the Book of Judges, for example, supposedly Chaucer's source for the tragedy of Samson, the Scriptural author uses simile only functionally; three times he illustrates the way bonds are loosed from the hero: "the ropes around his arms became as flax that is consumed by the fire" (15:14), "he snapped the strings as a thread of tow is severed by a whiff of flame" (16:9), and "he snapped them off his arms like thread" (16:12). Apart from these examples, the entire narrative from the prophecy concerning Samson's birth to his final triumph in death is without formal simile. Chaucer omits the portions of the story in which Samson supposedly confesses the kinds of bonds that will hold him fast, only to demonstrate his strength each time. Thus he imitates the direct, factual style of the original narrator and introduces no similes whatever.

Chaucer drew upon several sources for his account of Hercules; the list of the hero's gigantic accomplishments he may have taken from Boethius; the subsequent narrative contains elements found in the Metamorphoses and Heroides. The tag "fresh as May," describing Dianira, is obviously

introduced for its rime value. Apart from this conventional phrase, Chaucer uses no simile despite the fact that Ovid had introduced several rather lengthy examples to describe Hercules' vengeance upon the messenger who brought him the poisoned shirt and to depict vividly the hero's appearance on the funeral pyre. The fate of Lichas, accused by Hercules of blame for having brought the poisoned garment, is described as follows:

But pleading, clasping still, by Hercules
 Was seized, and swung three times or more, and whirled,
 Like stone by war's impetuous engine hurled,
 Into Euboean seas and, as in air
 He hung, he felt some hardening influence there,
 Like to the change which raindrops undergo,
 When, touched by freezing sinds, they turn to snow;
 Then, as the flakes spin round, their substance frail,
 Compacted more, solidifies to hail.
 So he, through space by arms so powerful thrown,
 (Bloodless with fear, his natural moisture flown)
 Turned, so antiquity averred, to stone.⁴³

Hercules' funeral and assumption of immortality are described by two similes:

[Hercules, on a self-made pyre] was seen,
 As the fierce flames took hold, a look werene:
 So, at the banquet, might a guest recline,
 With garlands crowned, amidst the flowing wine.⁴⁴

The snake, which sheds its age with weeds outworn,
 In mail new-burnished thrills with life reborn:
 So, stripped of what was mortal, Hercules
 Felt, in the finer part, his strength increase.⁴⁵

⁴³ Tr. Watts, p. 198-9.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 199.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 200.

Only one simile occurs in the account of this story in the Heroides. Deianira complains to Hercules: "As the ill-mated steer yoked miserably at the plough, so fares the wife who is less than her mighty lord."⁴⁶ Chaucer, in his account, omits any mention of the messenger. He enlarges neither upon the complaints of Dianira, nor upon the actual death of Hercules, but merely moves on to a statement about the fickleness of Fortune. Perhaps the omission of similes may represent a conscious attempt to create a direct style comparable to that of other tales based on sources less rhetorically ornate than Ovid.

In the tragedies of Nabugodonosor and Balthasar which follow, no similes are used unless the description of the transformation of the former be admitted:

And lik an egles fetheres wax his heres;
His nayles lyk a briddes clawes were; (3365-6)

This is an exact rendering of the passage, presumably intended to be taken literally, in Daniel 4:30: ". . . till his hairs grew like the feathers of eagles and his nails like birds' claws." The Biblical narrative includes two passages of simile, besides the interpretation of the symbolic dreams. The statue, of which the iron, clay, brass,

⁴⁶ Ovid, Heroides and Amores, tr. Grant Showerman, Loeb Classical Library Edition, New York, Macmillan, 1914, p. 111.

silver, and gold lay "broken to pieces together" becomes "like the chaff of a summer's thrashing floor . . . carried away by the wind" (Dan. 2:35). The prayer of Ananias includes a passage of traditional simile: "To whom thou hast spoken, promising that thou wouldst multiply their seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the sea shore. . ." (Dan. 3:36). But Chaucer's account has not sufficient room to treat of the dream, nor does he focus attention upon the men of God in the fiery furnace. Thus as purely factual narratives, these tragedies have no need of simile.

Although the tragedy of *Cenobia* is sixteen stanzas in length, not a single simile is used in it. The source is probably Boccaccio's *De claribus mulieribus*, a work in which the direct narrative style occasionally includes dramatic apostrophe but almost no simile. Charles G. Osgood accounts in this way for Boccaccio's lack of ornamentation:

Many of his tales provoke no interpretation or comment. He is quite content with mere narration, partly, it may be, to leave room for the reader's poetizing imagination, partly, perhaps, because the tale justifies itself in the telling.⁴⁷

Whether consciously or not, Chaucer seems to have acquiesced in this line of thought and followed suit.

⁴⁷ Boccaccio on Poetry; Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Book of Boccaccio's *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* in an English Version with Introductory Essay and Commentary, Library of Liberal Arts, No. 82, New York, Liberal Arts Press, 1930, p. xxix.

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The three very short tragedies which follow, the so-called "Modern Instances," use no simile at all, except for the conventional phrase used in describing a coat of arms:

The feeld of snow, with th'egle of blak therinne,
Caught with the lymrod coloured as the gleede.
(3573-4)

No simile appears in the account of Ugolino which Chaucer claims to have derived from Dante. In the original account only one simile occurs:

When he had said this, with eyes awry,
he seized again the wretched head with his
teeth
which gnawed upon the bone, like a dog's.⁴⁸

This observation, of course, pertains to the eternal reenactment of the earthly crime; thus it does not enter into Chaucer's narrative which ends with Ugolino's death, a comment upon Fortune, and a reference to Dante as the poet who tells the story in "a lenger wise."

The Nero tragedy is supposed to be derived partly from the Roman de la Rose and partly from Boccaccio's De Casibus Virorum Illustriorum. Chaucer's expression describing Nero as "vicius/ As any feend that lith ful lowe adoun," seems to be his phraseology; the rest of the narrative is told with Boccaccian directness.

In the Biblical account of Judith almost no similes are used. Once the Assyrians are said to cover the earth

48 Inferno, XXXIII, 76-8, tr. Huse, p. 159.

"like locusts" (Jud. 3:11); elsewhere the Israelites are described as "sheep that have no shepherd" (11:15). But in the description of Holofernes' tent there is nothing which might have suggested to Chaucer the phrase "large as is a berne" unless the leader's drunkenness connotatively suggested animal behavior. On the contrary, the great leader is described as being under a canopy, "which was woven of purple and gold, with emeralds and precious stones" (Jud. 10:19). Because of its position in the verse, it seems logical to presume that Chaucer's barn simile was introduced solely to provide a rime for "Oloferne."

In the last three tragedies of Alexander, Julius Caesar, and Croesus there is no simile at all, unless the adjective "leonyn" describing Alexander's courage be admitted.

It would seem, then, that in constructing this series of narratives Chaucer felt constrained to make his style as directly factual as possible--as had Boccaccio in writing similar tales; the four instances of conventional simile in the Monk's Tale seem to have been inserted merely for meter and rime.

4. Anelida and Arcite.

In the enigmatic work of Anelida and Arcite there is a far larger number of similes used than in the tragedies of

the Monk's Tale. Although the core of the work is a love story, the main burden of the work is in the form of a complaint, a lyric form allowing for some expansion of diction. No great originality appears in regard to the similes chosen, but their frequency recalls the earlier French models more strikingly than the Boccaccian tone of simplicity.

The description of Anelida as "fairer . . . then is the sonne shene" is too conventional to require comment. Comparison with Penelope and Lucretia in regard to steadfastness may go back to the passages from the Roman de la Rose cited above in connection with a parallel simile in the Book of the Duchess (1080-2). The line "And dide him honour as he were a kyng" is likewise conventional; a similar phrase occurs in the Clerk's Tale, "As she an emperour's daughter were."

The first simile warranting special notice is the description of the false Arcite:

This fals Arcite, sumwhat moste he feyne,
 When he wex fals, to covere his traitorie,
 Ryght as an hors, that can both bite and pleyne;
 For he bar her on honde of trecherie,
 And swor he coude her doublenesse espie,
 And al was falsnes that she to him mente.
 Thus swor this thef, and forth his way he wente.
 (155-61)

In glossing the passage Skeat notes:

To pleyne or to whyne means to utter a plaintive cry, or to whinny; and the sense is--'like a horse (of doubtful temper), which can either bite or whinny (as if wanting a caress). 49

49 Skeat, I, 535.

The same idea appears later in the Wife of Bath's Prologue in which she describes the trick of putting her lover on the defensive in order to avoid accusation herself. The simile seems appropriate in both contexts; in each case the person degraded by comparison with an animal is seen to be exercising caprice unworthy of man endowed with reason. In the case of Anelida, her reaction is described in terms of a being of even lesser order; quite conventionally she falls to the ground "ded . . . as a ston."

But Chaucer returns to the equine simile almost immediately:

His newe lady holdeth him so narowe
Up by the bridil, at the staves ende,
That every word he dredeth as an arowe;
Her daunger made him both bowe and bende. (183-6)

The likening of sharp words to arrows may be traced at least to the composer of Psalm 63: "Shelter me against the council of malefactors . . . who aim like arrows their bitter words" (3-4).

The next comparison sounds as though it should be proverbial, but it is not so noted by either Skeat or Robinson:

For thogh I hadde yow to-morowe ageyn,
I myghte as wel holde Aperill fro rayn,
As holde yow, to make yow be stidfast. (308-10)

The idea of picturing a reversal of nature's laws is recognized by Curtius as an example of topoi in his European

Literature and the Latin Middle Ages;⁵⁰ an even more striking example of it appears later in Criseyde's promise of fidelity. Perhaps a prototype may be seen in Psalm 113 in which the jubilation of nature is expressed in terms of the Jordan's turning backward and the mountains' skipping like rams, "the hills like little lambs."

When Ovid used the mast as a term of comparison, he made of it a symbol of uprightness and strength. Although in the Miller's Tale the carpenter's wife is described as "Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt," the mast symbol in Anelida and Arcite is used for different purposes in the cynical complaint of the heroine regarding the "trouthe of man":

Who that hem loveth, she shal hem fynde as fast
As in a tempest is a roten mast. (313-4)

Whether Chaucer derived this simile from observation or from literary predecessors,⁵¹ it is strikingly effective.

Two allusions to song provide the last similes of the Anelida. The first refers to a French moral poem of the thirteenth century which warns those who sing that they will weep thereafter. As Robinson points out, the "expression

50 Tr. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series XXXVI, New York, Pantheon Books, 1953, p. 94.

51 Paull F. Baum, "Chaucer's Nautical Metaphors," South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol. 49 (1950), 67-73.

became proverbial for joy that ends in woe." A similar allusion may be found in the Romaunt, VI, 28 f. The last simile used by Anelida likens her complaint to a swan song, already traditional by Chaucer's time.

But as the swan, I have herd sayd ful yore,
 Ayeins his deth shal singen his penaunce,
 So singe I here my destinee or chaunce,
 Now that Arcite Anelida so sore
 Hath thirled with the poynt of remembraunce. (346-50)

Shannon has commented upon Chaucer's use of this simile:

Probably the most striking resemblance between any single one of Ovid's Epistles and the Anelida is found in the suggestions of both Dido and Anelida that their laments are swan-songs. Both, in declaring that fate is against them and that they must accept the inevitable, compare themselves to the dying swan:

Sic ubi fata vocant, udis abjectus in herbis
 Ad vada Maeandri concinit albus olor,
 Nec quia te nostra sperem prece posse moveri,
 Adloquor (adverso movimus ista deo).
 (Her., vii, 3-8)⁵²

According to Ernest Martin, on the authority of D. G. Elliott who wrote Wild Fowl of North America, the swan song has a basis in fact as well as literature.⁵³ Perhaps Ovid had encountered similar testimony.

⁵² Op. Cit., p. 42.

⁵³ Birds of the Latin Poets, Stanford, California U. Press, 1914, p. 83. Elliott describes his experience "shooting in Curretuck" when one swan, flying at a considerable height, was mortally wounded. Descending, he continued his song until the water was reached. Elliott adds, ". . . never before nor since have I heard any [notes] like those sung by the stricken bird. Most plaintive in character and musical in tone, it sounded at times like the soft running of the notes in an octave . . ."

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If the analysts of the chronology of Chaucer's works are correct in putting into the period 1372-80 the works discussed in this chapter, an amazing diversity seems to be present in regard to Chaucer's use of simile. Numerous examples of this figure appear in the House of Fame, for the most part clustered in scenes requiring visual or auditory delineation; fewer appear, proportionately, in the Anelida, and almost none find their way into the Monk's Tale. It would seem that for the most part Chaucer followed the example of the writers in whose genre he was working; from the French he derived many of his conventional similes; from Boccaccio he learned an appreciation of terse factual narrative creating the sense of rapid pace. Both types of writing influenced his subsequent work.

CHAPTER V

SIMILES IN CHAUCER'S "ITALIAN PERIOD"

Although a certain degree of Boccaccian and Ovidian influence has already been noted in the works written between 1372 and 1380, a fuller assimilation of Italian influence is evident in the works of the years 1380-86, which are, according to Robinson,

the Parliament of Fowls (possibly a little earlier); Palamon, Troilus, probably preceded shortly by the Boece; some of the short poems, probably including the Boethian group of ballades; the Legend of Good Women.¹

1. The Parliament of Fowls.

If John Speirs is correct in assessing Chaucer's poetry as "growing out of allegory," and if his definition of medieval allegorical poem as "expanded simile"² be accepted, a framework is prepared in which the Parliament of Fowls may be appreciated as one of Chaucer's finest and most characteristic works. Throughout the poem the sense of allegory is unmistakable, although scholars hesitate to allow applications more specific than that the birds represent social classes, political figures, or courtly lovers.

1 The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd Edition, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957, p. xxix.

2 Chaucer the Maker, London, Faber and Faber, 1951, p. 26.

Personal allusions may indeed be present, but there is no unanimity among critics in regard to specific referends. But perhaps because the allegory is itself such a tightly-knit structure, likening one world to another, Chaucer used surprisingly few short, separate similes. Only some ten examples may be cited, three of which are merely conventional phrases of comparison. The other seven are neither particularly striking nor effective. Yet the total impact of the human scene represented by the avian world is that of a masterpiece.

The three phrases of comparison may be examined quickly: "green as emerald," "hot as fire," and "true as steel." The first of these, although at first sight purely conventional, is noteworthy only in that it departs from the more usual cliché "green as grass." George Odell, who made an intensive study of simile and metaphor in English and Scottish ballads,³ has noted that in this genre no other object of comparison except grass is ever used for the color green. Because Chaucer was describing the greenness of trees, it was natural that he should seek a term of comparison less closely related than grass. The phrase "hot as fire" is too commonplace to warrant notice, except that in Chaucer's context it describes the sighs emerging from the temple of

³ Simile and Metaphor in the English and Scottish Ballads, New York, Columbia College, p. 40.

Venus. The same comparison occurs in Boccaccio's Il Filostrato, a work which provided abundant material for the Troilus subsequently. The third phrase "true as steel" must have been common in colloquial English long before Chaucer's day. The author of Beowulf had used steel as a term of comparison denoting strength: "Each of the nail-points was very like steel."⁴ The Wakefield Master used the exact phrase repeatedly in the Second Shepherd's Play; e.g., (Mak) "And I am trew as steyl . . ." (l. 226); (First Shepherd) "It is true as steyll/ That prophetys have spokyn" (ll. 699-700).⁵

Among the similes which must be examined separately, the first is of the type which is a genuine comparison of two figures without the explicit use of the word like or as:

For out of olde felde, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yer,
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere. (22-5)

Chaucer calls attention himself to the commonplace nature of his comparison by the parenthetical phrase "as men seyth."

In fact, as Robert Payne has pointed out, the same idea occurs repeatedly in the works of Chaucer:

⁴ Beowulf, A Verse Translation into Modern English by Edwin Morgan, Aldington, The Hand and Flower Press, 1952, l. 985.

⁵ A. C. Cawley, ed., The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle, Manchester University Press, 1958, p. 49; p. 62.

In nearly every one of his major poems there appears some variant of the 'old fields--new corn' metaphor . . . usually employed as a part of the machinery introducing some acknowledged plagiarism through which we are to be conducted to the heart of the poem.⁶

The second example, for which Skeat gives as modern parallel, "a donkey between two bundles of hay,"⁷ occurs when the dreamer hesitates before choosing one of the alternative gates:

Right as, betwixen adamauntes two
Of evene myght, a piece of yren set
Ne hath no myght to meve to ne fro--
For what that oon may hale, that other let--
Ferde I, that nyste whether me was bet
To entre or leve, til Affrycan, my gide,
Me hente, and shof in at the gates wide. (148-54)

Robinson explains that although the primary meaning of adamauntes was "diamond," the word was also used to signify "loadstone"--as it does in this context. In connection with this simile Koepfel cites a passage from the Roman de la Rose which contains at least the basic idea of a magnetizing force:

Cum la pierre de l'aiment
Trait a soi le fer soutilment,
Ainsinc atrait les cuers des gens
Li ors qu'en donne a li argens . . . (1165-8)⁸

⁶ The Key of Remembrance, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, p. 65.

⁷ Oxford Chaucer, I, 511.

⁸ "Chauceriana," Anglia, Vol. 14 (1891), p. 242.

Ovid had chosen a more violent image to depict dilemma:

As, when two herds in vales far sundered lie,
A tiger, pricked by hunger, hears them cry,
And doubts, on fire for both, which way to go,
So he, between the right- and left-hand foe.⁹

The next example, which could arise from the experience of any man, is probably Chaucer's own formulation:

For thow of love hast lost thy tast, I gesse,
As sek man hath of swete and bytternesse. (160-1)

This, like the following implied simile which so vividly depicts the possibility of vicarious experience, defies the efforts of scholars to trace sources.

But natheles, although that thow be dul,
Yet that thow canst not do, yit mayst thow se.
For many a man that may nat stonde a pul,
It liketh hym at the wrestlyng for to be. (162-5)

The three similes just noted, all of which seem largely original with Chaucer, are of the type discussed in connection with the House of Fame. The speaker attempts to translate an experience into terms of the familiar world; thus he uses as exact an equivalent as possible in the manner of Dante. The following three similes, on the other hand, represent more traditional patterns.

The goddess Nature is described by a simile of the same type as the one depicting the Duchess in the speech of the bereaved knight:

⁹ Metamorphoses, V, tr. A. E. Watts, Berkeley University of California Press, 1954, p. 100.

Tho was I war wher that ther sat a queene
 That, as of lyght the somer sonne shene
 Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure
 She fayrer was than any creature. (298-301)

Far less ornate than the earlier passage (Book of the Duchess, 817-827),¹⁰ this description of Nature seems to build upon a well known tradition; stock response must have been expected to compensate for the lack of "novelty, originality, or rarity"¹¹ ideally found in simile.

The picture of the formel playing her expected role as the beloved in a court of love is stereotyped. So perfectly is the setting prepared and the tone sustained that it is only when cited out of context that the humor of the situation emerges:

Ryght as the fresshe, rede rose newe,
 Ayeyn the somer sonne coloured is,
 Ryght so for shame al wexen gan the hewe
 Of this formel, whan she herde al this; (442-5)

In his excellent study of the Parliament of Fowls, J. A. W. Bennett has noted that "the distinctions between the world of bird and man begin to blur" when the formel eagle "can blush out of modesty and be compared, like any courtly heroine, to the 'freshe rede rose newe.'"¹² No one is surprised when a

¹⁰ See supra. p. 65 f. for analogues cited by Fansler, dating back as far as the Arabian Nights. Also see E. Hammond, English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey, p. 452.

¹¹ Alexander Bain, English Composition and Rhetoric, New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1867, p. 24.

¹² The Parlement of Foules; An Interpretation, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 153.

beautiful woman is compared to a dove; or when Chaucer presents Criseyde as "fresshe as faucon comen out of mewe"; the process in reverse is equally effective in the Parliament wherein the formel anticipates the lifelike humanity of the barnyard characters in the Nun's Priest's Tale.

The third example likewise has literary predecessors although Chaucer's application of the simile differs somewhat from that of Boethius. Chaucer writes:

Thow canst nat seen which thyng is wel beset!
 Thow farst by love as oules don by lyght:
 The day hem blent, ful wel they se by nyght.
 Thy kynde is of so low a wrechednesse
 That what love is, thow canst nat seen ne gesse.
 (598-602)

This scathing criticism of the unromantic duck differs in tone from Boethius' description of those who will not rise above the pursuit of earthly things to seek true wisdom:

But men may nat, for they have hir eien so wont to
 the derknesse of erthly thinges that they ne may nat
 lyften hem up to the light of cler sothfastnesse, but
 thei ben lyk to briddes of which the nyght lightneth 13
 his lokyng and the day blendith hem. (Boece, IV, pr. 4)

Perhaps Chaucer was already at work translating the Consolatio when he wrote the Parliament, in which case the simile would have been fresh in his mind.

Apart from the simile proper, there is one figure of speech (designated by Cicero as parallel, a subdivision of

13 Robinson, p. 365.

comparison)¹⁴ which gives almost the same effect as simile without like or as. One effective passage of the Parliament employs this figure. In accounting for his dream's arising from the reading of "Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun," the speaker explains:

The very huntere, slepyng in his bed,
 The wode ayeyn his mynde goth anon;
 The juge dremeth how his plees been sped;
 The cartere dremeth how his cartes gon;
 The riche, of gold; the knyght fyght with his fon;
 The syke met he drynketh of the tonne;
 The lovee met he hath his lady wonne. (99-105)

Seven parallels are cited in this passage to convey the idea that one is apt to dream of what is most significant to one's waking hours. Ostensibly the figure is used merely to make credible a rather fantastic dream vision. However, its function is rhetorically affective--as is Stevenson's later use of the figure in "Requiem": "Home is the sailor, home from the sea,/ And the hunter home from the hill."

Among the ten examples of simile and comparison which appear in the Parliament, only one, "blind as an owl," uses a bird as a term of comparison. However, throughout the work, brief epithets and longer phrases of characterization in dialogue indicate that Chaucer accepted the traditional attributes of the various birds inherited from the encyclopedists and bestiaries. As B. Harrison has pointed out:

¹⁴ De Inventione, tr. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library, London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1949, p. 49.

In so far as the theme of birds is concerned, Chaucer's evolution as an artist follows a fairly marked pattern. . . . Finally in The Canterbury Tales themselves the poet emerges as master of the concise simile, in which birds play a major role. The poet's interest in swift narrative precludes the extended simile inherited by the Renaissance writer of epic. The natures of birds had been fixed through the centuries of bestiary and encyclopedia. . . . Chaucer's use of avian figures is always medieval in manner in that birds are introduced symbolically. What distinguishes his later from his earlier work in this regard is his growing use of swift simile to depict character for its own sake.¹⁵

What seems to have happened at the time of the writing of the Parliament of Fowls is that Chaucer so thoroughly assimilated the symbolic characteristics of birds and their corresponding traits in human nature that they provided the material for many of the similes which were to figure among the outstanding stylistic features of the Canterbury Tales. At this time Chaucer was still relying upon conventional comparisons inherited from the French tradition and at times originating similes which derived their strength from appeal to common experience, as did Dante's. His major borrowings from Boccaccio were to come later within this period.

2. The Knight's Tale.

In his discussion of the difference in spirit between Chaucer's Knight's Tale and Boccaccio's Teseide from

¹⁵ Thomas P. Harrison, They Tell of Birds: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Drayton, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1956, p. 51-52.

which it is largely derived, H. W. Cummings has noted:

The Italian poem abounds in classical allusions, and in its use of Homeric similes it is hardly inferior to the Divina Commedia itself. Again and again they are found in the text. . . . Chaucer, of course, retains a number of Boccaccio's classical imitations. . . . The Homeric simile he drops in his briefer metrical romance.¹⁶

He goes on, then, to discuss what he considers the "new atmosphere" created by Chaucer--one of "realism" which, he alleges, depends neither upon the "devices of pseudo-classicism" nor upon the tradition of the medieval metrical romance, "but . . . depends upon life."¹⁷ Cummings concludes that the Knight's Tale emerges from Chaucer's hands as a "thoroughly English poem."¹⁸

W. P. Ker has likewise praised the achievement of Chaucer in regard to the Knight's Tale: "This simplicity of style is the perfection of mere narrative, as distinguished from the higher and more elaborate forms of epic poetry or prose . . ."¹⁹

¹⁶ Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to the Italian Works of Boccaccio, Menasha, Wisconsin, George Banta Publishing Company, 1916, p. 143.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁹ Essays on Medieval Literature, New York, Macmillan, 1905, p. 90.

Charles Muscatine has recently directed much attention to the principle of order operating throughout the work. He has called the tale a "poetic pageant" whose "design expresses the nature of the noble life."²⁰

A study of the similes in the Knight's Tale corroborates the findings of these three critics. Chaucer retains almost none of Boccaccio's epic similes; he achieves paradoxically an effect of continuously moving narrative without sacrificing the majesty of the poetic pageant. The similes he introduces tend to appear in clusters, contributing by their distribution to the sense of symmetry established by the balanced study of the two protagonists.

In the entire Knight's Tale there appear approximately fifty examples of simile and comparison, of which about thirty-five consist in the briefest of phrases and another half dozen add to such phrases merely minimal modifiers. For purposes of discussion these will be handled first before proceeding to a more detailed examination of the few bona fide similes.

The initial exposition of the story--the triumph of Theseus, the pleas of the bereaved women, the championing of their cause, and the subsequent capture and imprisonment of

²⁰ Chaucer and the French Tradition, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1957, p. 181.

Palamon and Arcite, all condensed into one hundred seventy-five lines, allows no room for expansion by simile. But as soon as the heroine is introduced, three conventional comparisons appear to describe her:

. . . Emelye, that fairer was to sene
 Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,
 And fressher than the May with floures newe--
 For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
 I noot which was the fyner of hem two--

And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong. (1035-9; 1055)

The idea of competition between the flower and the girl has overtones of the Roman de la Rose; the phrase "as an aungel" comes directly from Boccaccio in the original context.

The next phrase of comparison describes the view which Palamon and Arcite had from the prison:

That thorgh a wyndow, thikke of many a barre
 Of iren greet and square as any sparre
 He [Palamon] cast his eye of Emelya . . . (1075-7)

It seems redundant to reënforce the attribute "square"--the comparison adds little except alliteration and emphasis.

According to Cummings, Chaucer suffers by comparison with Boccaccio at this point of the story.

Compared with those which introduce the corresponding scene in the Teseide, the lines in the English poet's work which picture to us the first view that Palamon has of Emilia are almost crude. . . . Much prettier is the picture in the Teseide, when Emilia comes straying into the garden, making garlands and
 Sempre cantando be' versi d'amore
 Con angelica voce a lieto core (III, 10),
 and Arcita, attracted
 Al suon di quella voce grazioso (III, 11)

risers and forces his head through the bars of his prison window in order to catch a glimpse of the lady.²¹

The next group of short comparisons occurs in the description of Arcite after his release from prison, another context in which one would expect to find conventional phraseology of the courtly love tradition. Arcite is presented as utterly distraught:

His slep, his mete, his drynke, is hym biraft,
That lene he wax and drye as is a shaft;
His eyen holwe, and grisly to biholde,
His hewe falow and pale as asshen colde. (361-4)

The shaft was probably chosen primarily for its rime; cold ashes appear frequently in Chaucer to describe pallor. The passage which follows, distinguishing Arcite's illness as "not only like the loveris maladye of Hereos" but rather like "mania engendered of melancholy humor"²² is less a simile than a literal diagnosis.

When, after his employment in the retinue of Theseus, Arcite sets out to perform the rites of May, he rides a courser "startlynge as the fir." Chaucer uses this same expression again in the Legend of Good Women (1204). The word startling is, according to the New English Dictionary, "a moving about, rushing about"; it appears in Barbour's Bruce:

²¹ Op. Cit., p. 137.

²² Skeat, V, 69. For a detailed and scholarly discussion of the distinction see J. L. Lowes' article in Modern Philology, Vol. 11, p. 491 f.

"A gret stertling he mycht haiff seyne Off schippys." But the comparison with fire is credited to Chaucer. Its application in the Knight's Tale is felicitous, not only because of the vivid picture evoked but also because of the traditional connotation of love as fire.

The encounter between Palamon and Arcite in the woods includes a cluster of nine conventional phrases of comparison. Palamon, overhearing Arcite's monologue, starts out of the thick bushes "as he were wood." Arcite, recognizing Palamon, pulls out his sword "fiers as leon." On the following day Arcite fulfills his promise to return for the combat "allone as he was born." After the initial description of their attitudes (in an extended simile which will be discussed below), the combat is described in conventional superlatives. After arming each other with true chivalric courtesy, each "as freendly as he were his owene brother,"

They foynen ech at oother wonder longe.
 Thou myghtest wene that this Palamon
 In his fightyng were a wood leon,
 And as a crueel tigre was Arcite;
 As wilde bores gone they to smyte,
 That frothen whit as foam for ire wood. (1654-9)

There is no attempt at originality in the comparisons, but there is the perfect balance of symmetry: one a lion, the other a tiger--together a pair of wild boars. The foaming at the mouth contrasts violently with the preceding scene of brotherly assistance.

Robinson calls attention to the use of the wild boar simile in the Thebaid, XI, 530 ff.:

As when rage has set lightning-swift boars rushing headlong to the fight, and raised the bristles erect upon their backs, fire quivers in their eyes, and the curved tusks of crescent shape ring loud; from a neighbouring height the anxious hunter watches the fray, and bids his hounds be silent: so bloodthirsty do they attack, nor yet do they deal mortal wounds, but the blood flows, the crime is accomplished.²³

Whether or not Chaucer remembered Statius, he repeated the comparison in lines describing Theseus' discovery of the fight:

He was war of Arcite and Palamon
That foughten breme, as it were bores two. (1698-9)

Theseus' amazement that all this can be happening over the love of Emily who is completely ignorant of their love calls forth a proverbial simile which scholars have been unable to gloss to their satisfaction:

She woot namoore of al this hoote fare,
By God, than woot a cokkow or an hare! (1809-10)

Robinson notes:

Both reading and interpretation are doubtful. MSS El Hg Cp read of, and there may have been a proverb to the effect that the cuckoo knows little of the hare. But of, as Mr. Manly remarks, may be a mistake for or, which has the support of good MSS.²⁴

Whichever reading is correct, the use of such a proverbial tone seems to bring the stately Theseus somewhat down to

23 Tr. J. H. Mozley, London, William Heinemann Ltd, Vol. 2, p. 429.

24 Robinson, p. 676.

earth and prepares the reader for his humane and understanding judgement revealed then and at the end of the story.

The next three phrases of comparison occur in the descriptions of the temples. Venus' statue is half submerged in green waves and "brighte as any glass"; in the temple of Mars, Ire is depicted as "reed as any gleede," and the statue of Mars himself "looked grym as he were wood." The first is utterly commonplace; the second is equally so, but was probably taken straight from Boccaccio:

Videvi l' Ire rosse, come fuoco
E le Paura pallida in quel loco. (Tes., VII, 33)

Wise suggests that Boccaccio in turn borrowed from Statius' Thebaid:

Iraeque rubentes Exanguesque Metus. (VII, 48)²⁵

But even if he borrowed, Boccaccio seems to have been responsible for the comparison "come fuoco."

Perhaps the largest single cluster of trite comparisons occurs in the passage introducing the kings who have come to the tournament in the interests of the two rivals. Their function is merely to enhance visually the solemnity and splendor of the occasion; in this role, as well as in the furnishing of a hundred knights each, the visiting potentates help create an impression of symmetry. Chaucer uses the same

²⁵ "And Anger's flushing red and pallid fear"--tr. Mozley. See Boyd Ashby Wise, The Influence of Statius upon Chaucer, Baltimore, J. H. Furst Co., 1911, p. 93.

type of extravagant cliché to describe both Lycurgus and Emetreus.

The fabulous animal, half eagle and half lion, is chosen as the initial symbol of Lycurgus. "And lik a griphon looked he aboute" (2133). In the wake of the Divine Comedy the griffon carries deep significance, for the chariot representing the Church Triumphant in the Purgatorio is drawn by a griffon to symbolize Christ in His two natures.²⁶ After a description of Lycurgus' imposing stature and general appearance, Chaucer enumerates the splendors of the king's trappings:

Ful hye upon a chaar of gold stood he,
 With foure white boles in the trays.
 In stede of cote-armure over his harnays,
 With nayles yelewe and brighte as any gold,
 He hadde a beres skyn, col-blak for old.
 His longe heer was kembed bihynde his bak;
 As any ravenes fethere it shoon for blak;
 A wrethe of gold, arm-greet, of huge wighte,
 Upon his heed, set ful of stones brighte
 Of fyne rubyes and of dyamauntz.
 Aboute his chaar ther wenten white alauntz,
 Twenty and mo, as grete as any steer
 To huntten at the Leoun or the deer. (2138-50)

Within this passage five phrases of comparison are used. The first, "bright as any gold," said of the nails of the bear whose skin was "col-blak," refers to an old custom of gilding the nails of animals when their hide was worn as cloaks. In Teseide (VI, 36), "Evandro came with the skin of a bear whose

26 Canto XXIX, tr. Huse, p. 304 f.

nails were covered with shining gold."²⁷ The adjective "col-blak" uses one of the traditional terms of comparison, too ancient to be traced. The use of raven's feathers as a norm for blackness of hair dates back at least to the Canticle of Canticles (5:11): "His locks as the branches of palm trees, black as a raven." The last comparison, "white alauntz" (wolf hounds) "as grete as any steer" is literal--or perhaps mildly exaggerated, but it does not warrant investigation as a figure of speech.

On the other hand, the rival king, Emetreus, is pictured as "ridyng lyk the god of armes, Mars." After his initial introduction, he too is described in a passage crowded with phrases of comparison:

His sadel was of brend gold newe ybete;
 A mantelet upon his shulder hangyng,
 Bret-ful of rubyes rede as fyr sparklyng;
 His criske heer lyk rynges was yronne,
 And that was yelow, and glytered as the sonne.

.....
 And as a leon he his lookyng caste.
 Of fyve and twenty yeer his age I caste.
 His berd was wel bigonne for to spryng;
 His voys was as a trompe thonderyng.

.....
 Upon his hand he bar for his deduyt
 An egle tame, as any lilye whyt. (2162-78)

A sense of balance is achieved not only by the provision of the same type of description as the foregoing one and an almost exact distribution of comparisons, but even by the use

27 Sources and Analogues, p. 98.

of lion and eagle separately, whereas in the first picture they had been combined in the griffon image. The phrases in themselves are utterly commonplace: "rede as fyr," hair curled "like rings," yellow hair that "glittered as the sonne," voice "as a trompe thonderynge," and eagle "white as a lily." Only the last phrase has given rise to some discussion, for no species of white eagle has been discovered. Robinson concludes that Chaucer used the word eagle in a generic sense (as he does in the Parliament of Fowls) and included falcons, which may be white, within the classification. No editor seems to have considered the possibility of reading the line with this meaning: "An eagle, tame as a white lily."

Passages such as the two quoted above lend weight to Muscatine's definition of the Knight's Tale as a "poetic pageant of the noble life." For many lines before and after this cluster, no comparisons appear to break the sense of simple narrative. Thus the focus upon visual splendor becomes more noticeable by sense of contrast. From this point on, no cluster of comparisons is used, although, occasionally, conventional phrases appear singly.

No similes at all are used in the account of Palamon's visit to the temple of Venus. But Emily's answer from Diana, made visible in the strange behavior of the fires, employs one simile of auditory imagery:

And as it queynte it made a whistelynge,
As doon thise wete brondes in hir brennynge. (2337-8)

This sound, followed by the appearance of drops of blood, creates a sense of ominous foreboding, as it recalls the experiences of Aeneas in the Polydorus episode, and similar accounts in Ovid (Metamorphoses, II, 325 ff.) and Dante (Inferno, XIII, 31-34). Arcite's visit to the temple of Mars is without simile, but his joy at receiving a favorable answer is so great that he returns to his inn "As fayn as fowel is of the brighte sonne." This expression is used by Chaucer in three other places; it had been used in the Romaunt (74 f.) and in Piers Plowman (B. x. 153). Both Skeat²⁸ and Haeckel²⁹ list it as proverbial.

Five other conventional phrases of comparison are scattered throughout the last part of the work: "Out goon the swerdes as the silver brighte" (2608); "He rolleth under foot as dooth a bal" (2614--perhaps a somewhat casual way of disposing of a courageous and victorious knight); "black as coal or crow" (2692), said of Arcite after his injury; "ylik as ootheres brother" (2734), mirroring Theseus' impartiality of treatment accorded to winners and losers; and "brente as

²⁸ Early English Proverbs, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1910, p. 94.

²⁹ Das Sprichwort bei Chaucer, Erlangen, Junge & Sohn, 1890, p. 50.

it were wood" (2950), said of the fire of Arcite's funeral pyre. The only example among these which seems to deserve special comment is the double comparison for Arcite's blackness. It would seem at first sight that the tone of such a phrase is too playful to be appropriate at such a crucial moment. But in view of the other flippant phrase, "Fare wel phisik! go ber the man to chirche!" (2760) the comparison is not amiss. As in the case of the Troilus, the exact feeling of the narrator is ambiguous. He seems to allow himself enough involvement to present a sympathetic viewpoint; yet he remains distant enough to evaluate things in a larger perspective.

Besides the short phrases of comparison discussed so far, there are a few similes which depend upon inference. The first seems to be a true simile, although the exact point of comparison between the two figures is implied rather than expressed. Palamon, left alone in prison, reflects upon his misfortune:

Therwith the fyr of jalousie up sterte
 Withinne his brest, and hente him by the herte
 So woodly that he lyk was to biholde
 The boxtree or the asshen dede and colde. (1299-1302)

The point of likeness is pallor, which the reader is supposed to assume is the result of passionate jealousy. The second example does not even use a word of comparison, but juxtaposition and literary association create a sense of simile:

Allas, I se a serpent or a theef,
 That many a trewe man hath doon mescheef,
 Goon at his large, and where hym list may turne. (1325-7)

An evil man has often been likened to a serpent. But specifically to associate "serpent" and "theef," predicating the same action of both, is to call to mind vividly the scene in the Inferno (XXV) in which a process of constant metamorphosis dramatizes this comparison. The third example of implied simile occurs in a description of the fierce fighting:

The brighte swerdes wenten to and fro
 So hidously that with the leeste strook
 It semed as it wolde felle an ook. (1700-2)

By implication, not only is the force of each stroke made more vivid, but the adversaries are incidentally likened to traditionally gigantic symbols of strength.

Three other similes fall between the short phrase of comparison and the fully extended simile. The first makes reference to a fable of Aesop and gives just enough detail to identify the story:

We stryve as dide the houndes for the boon;
 They foughte al day, and yet hir part was noon.
 Ther cam a kyte, whil that they were so wrothe,
 And baar away the boon bitwixe hem bothe. (1177-80)

The exact source Chaucer used is unknown, but the fable, according to Robinson, is almost the same as "The Lion and the Bear," No. 247 in Halm's edition, Leipzig, 1854. The second is a double simile:

We faren as he that dronke is as a mous,
 A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous,
 But he noot which the righte wey is thider,
 And to a dronke man the wey is slider.
 And certes, in this world so faren we;
 We seken faste after felicitee. (1261-66)

The first part, "dronke as a mous," is a common comparison, listed as proverbial by both Skeat and Haeckel. It is found, for example, in "The Man in the Moon":

When þat he is dronke ase a dreynt mous,
þenne we schule borewe þe wed ate bayly.³⁰

The second aspect of the simile likens man's search after worldly felicity to the drunken man's efforts to find the house which he knows exists but to which he cannot find his way. This second elaboration seems to be original with Chaucer. The third example is from the book of Ecclesiastes (3:18),³¹ perhaps borrowed by Chaucer from Innocent's De Contemptu Mundi or from Boethius:

For slayn is man right as another beast,
And dwelleth eek in prison and arreest,
And hath siknesse and greet adversitee,
And ofte tymes giltelees, pardee. (1309-12)

Apart from the short comparisons and similes thus far examined, there remain only five passages in the entire Knight's Tale which emerge as fully developed similes. Some of these are of the same type as epic simile; others are

³⁰ Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of MS Harley 2253, ed. G. L. Brook, Manchester, The University Press, 1948, p. 70.

³¹ "I said in my heart concerning the sons of men, that God would prove them and shew them to be like beasts. Therefore the death of man and of beasts is one; and the condition of them both is equal. As man dieth, so they also die."

patterns of parallel examples cumulatively creating an effect of simile.

The first example is of the latter type--a description of the lover's mood as changeable and unpredictable:

Now up, now doun, as boket in a welle.
 Right as the Friday, soothly for to telle,
 Now it shyneth, now it reyneth faste,
 Right so kan geery Venus overcaste
 The hertes of hir folk; right as hir day
 Is gereful, right so chaungeth she array,
 Selde is the Friday al the wowke ylike. (1532-9)

The first comparison is homely and typically Chaucerian in its gently flippant tone. The second invokes proverbial cliché--a French version of which reads:

Vendredy de la semaine est
 Le plus beau ou le plus laid.³²

Another version from Devonshire is even more succinct:

"Fridays in the week are never aleek."³³

The second example is one of the only truly epic similes to be found in Chaucer. It is derived, as might be expected, from the Teseide, which in turn borrows from the Thebaid. Chaucer's version reads:

Tho chaungen gan the colour in hir face,
 Right as the hunters in the regne of Trace,
 That stondesth at the gappe with a spere,
 Whan hunted is the leon or the bere,
 And hereth hym come russhyng in the greves,
 And breketh bothe bowes and the leves,

³² A. Jubinal, Recueil des Contes, p. 375. Cited by Skeat, V, 72.

³³ Skeat, Loc. Cit.

And thynketh, "Heere cometh my mortal enemy!
 Withoute faile, he moot he deed, or I;
 For outhur I moot sleen hym at the gappe,
 Or he moot sleen me, if that me myshappe,"--
 So ferden they in chaungyng of hir hewe,
 As fer as everich of hem oother knewe. (1637-48)

This long description refers to the encounter between Palamon and Arcite in the woods--a combat for the love of Emelye. Wise suggests that, although Chaucer's proximate source was probably the Teseide (strophes 106-7), Boccaccio's version strongly resembles a passage in the Thebaid:

Even so a hunter awaits a lion roused by long shouting from his lair in the brushwood of a Gaetulian forest, steeling his courage and holding his spear in a perspiring grip; his face is frozen in terror and his steps tremble; 'what beast approaches?' he wonders, and 'how mighty?' and he hears the roar that gives ominous signal, and measures the growing sound in blind anxiety. (IV, 494)³⁴

But Wise explains that the context in which each of the three authors introduced this simile varies: "Statius . . . to depict the dread of Eteocles as to the answer of the oracle. . . . Boccaccio . . . to portray the fear of Palemon and Arcita at the beginning of the tournament . . . Chaucer . . . on the occasion of their duel where it is much more appropriate."³⁵

After a description of the knightly bravery demonstrated by both sides during the tournament, attention is

³⁴ Tr. J. H. Mozley, Vol. 1, p. 543-5. Cited by Wise, Op. Cit., p. 90.

³⁵ Ibid.

focussed upon the two principal participants by means of two extended similes, of the type classified in Rhetorica ad Herennium as similitudo per negationem.³⁶ Equal in length, they contribute to the sense of symmetry found throughout the tale.

Ther nas no tygre in the vale of Galgopheye,
 Whan that hir whelp is stole whan it is lite,
 So crueel on the hunte as is Arcite
 For jelous herte upon this Palamon.
 Ne in Belmarye ther nys so fel leon,
 That hunted is, or for his hunger wood,
 Ne of his praye desireth so the blood,
 As Palamon to sleen his foe Arcite. (2626-33)

A simile following this pattern had served Jean de Meun in a completely different context:

. No ancient boar
 Could bristle half so fiercely when by dogs
 He is attacked; no lioness, beset
 By hunters while she give her cublings suck,
 Could be more fierce and fell; no snake whose tail
 Some wayfarer has trod upon (no joke
 It is for him!) could be more venomous
 Than wife who finds her spouse with someone else.³⁷

The last example is one of parallels wherein Theseus, after having allowed due time for grief, brings about the happy reunion of Palamon and Emelye. He argues that all things on earth come to a natural end, and he demonstrates his point by reference to the oak which grows, has a long

36 Tr. Harry Caplan, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1954, p. 378.

37 The Romance of the Rose, tr. Harry W. Robbins, ed. Charles W. Dunn, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1962, p. 197.

life, and finally wastes away; the stone, which, although hard, is eventually worn away under foot; the river, which, although broad, some time runs dry; towns which rise and fall; and, lastly, men who must without exception die. Thus, he asks, why mourn excessively for arcite who

Departed is with duetee and honour
Out of this foule prisoun of this lyf? (3060-1)

Even the Knight's Tale, then, which marks the first great impact of Boccaccio's poetry upon Chaucer, contains surprisingly few similes outside of conventional phrases of comparison or literal parallels to assist visualization or to strengthen argument. Only one full-fledged epic simile appears, and it is borrowed from Boccaccio and Statius. The two similes by negation are likewise in the epic style. But otherwise, Chaucer chooses to maintain his rapid pace of narration and direct communication with his audience, creating a genre more stately than the ordinary medieval romance, less voluminous and ornate than epic.

3. Troilus and Criseyde

Throughout the leisurely and spacious recounting of the "tragedye" of Troilus, Chaucer incorporates a number of similes from Boethius, whose work he had translated, and from Boccaccio, whose Il Filostrato furnished the basic plot and characterization for Troilus and Criseyde.

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An extensive analysis of the imagery of the Troilus and a study of Chaucer's debt to Boccaccio in this regard comprises an important section of Sanford B. Meech's book, Design in Chaucer's Troilus.³⁸ Meech divides the "imaginative associations" into four formal categories: metaphor, metonymy, simile, and illustration or analogy. Then he classifies the images according to subject manner:

The first includes associations with supernatural beings pagan or Christian and with Christian doctrine and practice. The second comprises those with conquest and relationship between ruler and ruled. The third takes in associations with a variety of human activities--arts, letters, sciences, crafts, and games. The fourth consists of those with the body, its states, sensations, or activities, and its preservation through medical care. The fifth is of those with the brute creation, both in its happy freedom and as it is pursued or controlled by man. The sixth is the pattern of insentient nature. It extends from figures of the single leaf or flower to panoramic ones of ship-tossing seas or of the circling heavens. The seventh pattern is that of fire and of the heat which it engenders and--antipodally--of cooling and positive cold.³⁹

Besides furnishing valuable statistical data, Meech, by examining in detail figurative patterns and relating them to the speakers, accounts for many of the changes wrought by Chaucer upon the original Boccaccian characters. However, Meech points out that of the figurative associations in any of the seven areas, "only a small proportion is taken from the Filostrato."

38 Syracuse University Press, 1959, Chapter III.

39 Ibid., p. 246.

Another significant contribution to the study of simile in the Troilus has been made by Henry W. Sams in his article "The Dual Time-Scheme in Chaucer's Troilus." By comparing the similes relating to the change of seasons, Sams notes that there are "two concentric and contradictory time-schemes; one of them based upon the formal dating of the books, the other upon a proportionately spaced series of seasonal images."⁴⁰ By this device Chaucer has achieved a much greater sense of unity than is found in the Filostrato.

As noted in his earlier works, Chaucer frequently created an atmosphere of exactitude in regard to visual and psychological details, after the example of Dante. Whenever comparisons represent elements chosen from the same kind of being, the effect is one of literal speech or weak simile. Thus when the narrator establishes rapport with other servants of love "as though I were hire owne brother dere" (I. 51) and when Criseyde promises to love Troilus "but as his suster" (II. 1224-5), no sense of simile emerges. Other examples of this type of comparison occur throughout the work: Troilus fears that in love he "shal byjaped ben a thousand tyme/ More than that fol of whos folie men ryme" (I. 531-2); the prospect of death to the sorrowful lover appears "a

⁴⁰ Modern Language Notes, Vol. 56 (1941), 94-100, reprinted in Chaucer Criticism, Troilus and Criseyde and the Minor Poems, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, University of Notre Dame Press, 1961, p. 180.

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gretter joie . . . than kyng of Grece ben and Troye" (I. 608-9); a fool guiding a wise man resembles the blind man passing safely what proves a stumbling block for one with vision (I. 628-30); sorrows pass with the same certainty as do joys (I. 836-7); the cure of love is likened to a wound which must be revealed to the physician for remedy (I. 857-8); fear of confessing love is like the fear of hell itself (I. 871-2); Criseyde's noble heart is like that of king ("A kynges herte semeth by hyrs a wrecche"--I. 889); the wound of love is again likened to a physical wound (I. 1086-92); Pandarus is like a comforter who thinks to heal a friend with psychological advice: "Thynk not on smert, and thow shalt fele non" (IV. 463-6); love is a gamble like a game of dice (IV. 1098-9); man may love woman as he does his life (V. 338-40); Troilus sees in his own plight material for a "book . . . like a storie" (V. 582-5); Criseyde finds the folk of "Troie town" as worthy as are any "bitwixen Orkades and Inde" (V. 969-71); the boar killed by Meleagre in Cassandra's story is "as gret as ox in stalle"; Troilus' angry reaction to his sister's prophecy causes him to start from his bed "As though al hool hym hadde ymad a leche" (V. 1536-7). Similar to these surface comparisons is the slightly more complex example invoked to describe the futility of trying to fool Calkas:

It is ful hard to halten unespied
Before a crepel, for he kan the craft. (IV. 1457-8)

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In each of the phrases cited, something is added to the literal statement by invoking a comparison, but little effect beyond that of more explicit specification is achieved.

Among the numerous classical allusions Chaucer uses, about a dozen examples are phrases of comparison in which a mythological person is made to stand for the ultimate degree of value or experience. The reference to Criseyde as fairer than "Eleyne or Polixene" (I. 453-5) continues the tradition which Chaucer inherited from the French poets and used freely in his early poetry. A similar comparison is implied in the description of Troilus:

But swich a knyghtly sighte, trewely,
As was on hym, was nought, withouten faille,
To loke on Mars, that god is of bataille. (II. 628-30)

When, however, Pandarus compares himself to the unfortunate Paris receiving the complaint of Oenone (I. 652-5), the effect of incongruity is subtly humorous.

Naturally the comparisons invoked to portray frustration and suffering abound in this story of a "double sorwe." Most of these phrases establish effectively the tone of woe intended by the speaker. Pandarus likens Troilus' sufferings to those of "Ticius in helle" (I. 876) and later the narrator describes this unfortunate lover as one who goes to bed "and walweth ther and torneth/ In furie, as doth he Ixion in helle" (V. 211-2). In using these names, Chaucer was merely following the time-honored tradition of Virgil, Horace, Ovid,

and Boethius. Troilus' despair is effectively expressed by comparison with that of the most tragic of Sophoclean heroes:

Ne nevere wol I seen it shyne or reyne,
But ende I wol, as Edippe, in derknesse
My sorwful lif, and dyen in distresse. (IV. 299-301)

Two classical heroines known for their bitter tears appear in widely separated contexts. The first is invoked by Pandarus in trying to shame Troilus for his lack of initiative at the outset.

For this nys naught, certein, the next wyse,
To wynnen love, as techen us the wyse,
To walwe and wepe as Nyobe the queene
Whos teres yet in marble ben ysene. (I. 697-700)

Robinson finds this "bit of local color, not found in the Filostrato . . . a characteristically Chaucerian addition, doubtless suggested by Ovid, Metamorphoses, VI. 312." The image of marble tears could scarcely be surpassed as an objective correlative for futile grief.

The other comparison of a similar nature describes the bitter grief of parting in Book IV. The sympathetic narrator observes:

So bittre teeris weep nought, as I fynde,
The woful Mirra thorough the bark and rynde. (IV. 1138-9)

Chaucer's contemporaries would have recognized the allusion to Ovid's story of the daughter of Cinyras, King of Cyprus, who was changed into a myrrh tree. Here the image of a living testimony of grief is used which combines the ideas of continued sorrow and inability to alleviate it. Poignancy is

intensified by the remembrance of Criseyde's interior monologue in which she has pictured the death she must surely undergo at parting and her subsequent joy in Elyseum,

Yet in the feld of pite, out of peyne,
That highte Elisos, shal we ben yfeere,
As Orpheus with Erudice, his fere. (IV. 789-91)

Little does Criseyde realize at this time how unworthy of comparison with the heroine she will prove when put to the test.

Other classical allusions similarly invite comparison beyond the merely obvious point of likeness. The narrator, caught up into an appreciation of love in Book III, wishes upon "wrecches that dispise/ Servise of love" the plight of Midas who grew long ears. Although the trait of covetousness is attributed to Midas in this context, elsewhere Chaucer refers to him as he appears in Ovid's story:

. . . Myda hadde, under his longe heres,
Growing upon his heed two asses eres. (WBT, 953-4)

Even without specific reference to the animal, the passage in the Troilus evokes the same picture, extending the criticism to Midas' analogue.

Again, in Book IV, Criseyde's father is referred to as "Argus eyed." Beyond the first meaning which was undoubtedly proverbial even in Chaucer's time, the reference invites further speculation. Eventually in the Ovidian story Argus was defeated by the initiative, cleverness, and persistence of Hermes. The Trojan Argus might well have

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been outwitted had Criseyde been sufficiently determined. But Criseyde is no Hermes, any more than she is the heroine mentioned in her apostrophe to night:

O nyght, allas! why nyltow over us hove,
As longe as what Almena lay by Jove? (III. 1427-8)

Before examining the extended similes which occur with greater frequency in the Troilus than in the earlier works, it is necessary to note Chaucer's continued use of brief conventional phrases of comparison. Considering the length of this work, the use of approximately thirty such phrases does not seem excessive. Some examples point undoubtedly to the need for a rime; others contribute positively by force of imagery.

The alliterative phrase "red as rose" occurs only once; it is predicated of Criseyde as she watches Troilus ride by the first time (II. 1256). Chaucer's favorite expression of this kind, "still as a stone," occurs five times: upon Pandarus' departure after revealing the secret of Troilus' love, Criseyde retires "into her closet" and sits "style as any ston" to reflect upon "every word" she has heard (II. 598-600); Pandarus goes to visit Troilus after laying plans for the meeting at the house of Deiphebus and enters "stille as any ston" (II. 1493); at the more crucial time of rendezvous, he unlocks the door to Troilus' hiding place near Criseyde's chamber and sits down with him "stille as stoon" to give last-minute instructions (III.698-700); returning from

the meeting of "parlement," Pandarus brings Troilus the sad news of their decision; tenderly weeping, he enters Troilus' dark chamber "as stille as ston" (IV. 354); and, finally, overwhelmed by shame at Criseyde's proved infidelity, Pandarus stands before Troilus "as stille as ston" and, perhaps for the first time in his life, "a word ne kowde he seye." (V. 1729) Thus four of the five uses of this phrase apply to Pandarus--three to describe his furtive actions, one to convey his tremendous chagrin. In three of the above examples the phrase supplies a rime; only in the last instance does it seem to bear its full denotative meaning, repeating as it does the idea of one being truly "astoned" (V. 1728).

The comparison "fresh as a falcon" is used by Chaucer to describe Criseyde as she watches Troilus riding by:

And whan that he com ridyng into town,
 Ful ofte his lady from hire wyndow down
 As fressh as faukoun comen out of muwe,
 Ful redy was hym goodly to saluwe. (III. 1782-5)

The same phrase occurs in the Filostrato, but it is applied to Troilo: "And, at the times when he saw Criseida, a new countenance and beauty came upon him as on a falcon when it casts off its hood." (III, 91)⁴¹ In regard to this change of referend Meech notes:

⁴¹ R. K. Gordon, tr., The Story of Troilus as told by Benoit de Sainte-Maure, Giovanni Boccaccio . . . Geoffrey Chaucer and Robert Henryson, London, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1934, p. 69.

Transfer to the heroine of the falcon simile, so prettily applied by Boccaccio to the hero on display, eliminates one hint of youthful softness in the man.⁴²

Most of the brief phrases of comparison were apparently as commonplace in Chaucer's day as we find them now. One such phrase, "proud as a peacock" (I. 210), was already common property among the Latin poets, as the numerous examples collected by Ernest Whitney Martin testify.⁴³ Chaucer's contemporaries used it frequently.⁴⁴

Other examples of utterly commonplace expressions which appear profusely among contemporaries are the following: "white as bon" (II. 925); "true as steel" (V. 831); "fresh as braunche in May (V. 844); "style as he ded were" (I. 723); "lik a ded ymage" (IV. 235); "lay as for ded" (IV. 1158); "sterve here as a gnat" (IV. 595); "as the deth him dredde" (I. 483); "streyght as lyne" (II. 1461); "as faste . . . com, as lyne right" (III. 227-8); "playde the leoun" (I. 1074); "hardy as lyoun" (V. 830); "lik of Paradys the ymage" (IV. 864); "cold as frost" (V. 535); "hotter than

⁴² Meech, Op. Cit., p. 328.

⁴³ Birds of the Latin Poets, Stanford University Press, 1914, p. 169.

⁴⁴ For example, see Piers Plowman, B. Text, XII. 240 also the Second Shepherd's Play, ed. A. C. Cawley, Manchester University Press, 1958, p. 44: "as prowde as a po" (l. 37).

the gleede" (IV. 337); "right as an aspes leaf . . . to quake" (III. 1200).

In some instances, such phrases contribute more effectively to their respective contexts than the ones listed above. Troilus' "desire of hope and of plesaunce" causes him to burn "as the fir" (III. 425-6). As Meech points out in assembling all such phrases which portray the fervor of the lover, "Chaucer's prince is progressively more inflamed from enamorment to consummation."⁴⁵ Yet Chaucer makes his hero more complex and refined than Troilo, and in general employs fewer images of fire to mirror passionate desire.

Instead of casually referring ^{to} death, the two following passages elaborate the basic concept in language which reënforces the tone of the context. Pandarus, encouraging Troilus to resist in regard to Criseyde's exchange, promises help:

Theigh ich and al my kyn, upon a stownde,
Shulle in a strete as dogges ligen dede (IV. 625-6)

The picturesque comparison merely adds emphasis to the self-image Pandarus has assumed as ideal friend. On the other hand, the description of Criseyde in her conversation with Pandarus after she knows the decision of "parlement" employs an image of death, Dantean in its simplicity and directness:

⁴⁵ Op. Cit., p. 359.

She was right swich to seen in hire visage
As is that wight that men on beere bynde; (IV. 862-3)

In his selection of the next conventional image to replace one of Boccaccio's, Chaucer has, in the opinion of Meech, contributed to the establishment of a more virile hero. He suggests that the idea of "youthful softness"

is reduced . . . by the substitution of a bird for a flower simile employed by the hero in the original. There, he soliloquized that never was rose so fair in the sweet springtime as he was disposed to become upon his lady's return; in Chaucer's poem, he is made to say:

For was ther nevere fowel so fayn of May ⁴⁶
As I shal ben, whan that she comth in Troie. (V.425-6)

A particularly well chosen comparison is used to depict Pandarus' glibness in presenting Criseyde's supposed grievances:

He rong hem out a proces like a belle
Upon hire foo, that highte Poliphete,
So heynous, that men myghte on it spete.
(II. 1615-17)

The proverbial expression of striking when the iron is hot, found also in the Tale of Melibeus, is alluded to in the lines,

Pandare, which that stood hire faste by,
Felte iren hoot, and he bygan to smyte. (II. 1275-6)

Another implied comparison used by Pandarus is taken directly from the Filostrato, Canto V. Chaucer's version reads:

Pandare answerde, "Be we comen hider
To fecchen fir, and rennen hom ayein?" (V. 484-5)

46 Op. Cit., p. 328.

Boccaccio's phrase, which likewise refers to the suggestion about leaving Sarpedon's house prematurely, reads: "Did we come here now to fetch fire, or is the tenth day come?"⁴⁷

Pandarus, in exhorting Troilus to exercise prudence in his love affair, relies upon a comparison used by Jean de Meun:

Thow art at ese, and hold the wel therinne
For also seur as reed is every fir,
As gret a craft is kepe wel as wyne. (III. 1632-4)

Koepfel cites the parallel expression:

Car la vertu n'est mendre
De bien garder et de deffendre
Les choses, quant el sunt aquises,
Que del aquerre en quelques guises.⁴⁸

The description of the Simois running through Troy downward to the sea "as an arwe clere" is reminiscent of passages in Ovid referring to that river, but the comparison seems to have been added by Chaucer. He is also credited with adding the comparison of tears "as bittre . . . as is ligne aloes or galle" to a passage derived from the Filostroto, although patterns of sweetness and bitterness abound in Boccaccio's work. The comparison with "ligne aloes" seems less commonplace than with "galle." The latter appears in a poem found in the Lambeth MS 853, about 1430:

⁴⁷ Tr. R. K. Gordon, p. 98.

⁴⁸ Anglia, Vol. 14(1891), p. 242.

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Fro hevyn shal a rayne falle,
 Hit shal be byttyr as ony galle
 Hytt shall be red as ony blod. (11-13)⁴⁹

An expression which appears in Chaucer as a hyphenated word still seems to have the force of comparison:

This tale was ay span-newe to bygynne,
 Til that the nyght departed hem atwynne. (III. 1665-6)

Robinson defines the word as "new as a chip just cut" and likens it to the Old Norse cognate "span-nyr."

All the foregoing examples indicate that Chaucer continued throughout the Troilus to employ conventional comparisons as he had from his earliest writing. This work, however, constitutes a landmark in his development as a user of the fully developed simile. Without allowing this figure to become obtrusive, Chaucer employs it frequently, especially in the first four books of the Troilus. As will be seen in detail, he derives most of his similes directly from source material but he gives them a form unmistakably his own.

The initial description of Criseyde is based upon Boccaccio, but elaborated by Chaucer:

So aungelik was hir natif beaute,
 That lik a thing immortal semed she,
 As doth an hevenyssh perfit creature,
 That down were sent in scornynge of nature. (I. 102-5)

⁴⁹ "Quindecim Signa ante diem Judicii," Hymns to the Virgin & Christ, the Parliament of Devils, and other Religious Poems (chiefly from Lambeth MS No. 853), ed. F. J. Furnivall, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, E.E.T.S. O.S. No. 24, p. 118.

Boccaccio's version is brief: "so like an angel to look upon that she seemed not a mortal thing."⁵⁰ The second compliment in simile to Criseyde departs more markedly from the original. Boccaccio's version follows the traditional pattern already noted above;⁵¹ Chaucer uses a more timely comparison--if indeed Lowes is correct in reading herein a tribute to Queen Anne:

Right as our first lettre is now an A,
In beaute first so stood she, makeless. (I, 171-2)

More traditional is Chaucer's subsequent affirmation:

Nas nevere yet seyn thyng to be praysed derre,
Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre
As was Criseyde. (I. 174-6)

The somewhat extended simile ironically comparing the self-assured, love-destined Troilus to a horse "feeling his oats" has not been traced to any anterior work, although the name Bayard comes from the famous bay-colored steed given by Charlemagne to Renaud.

As proude Bayard gynneth for to skippe
Out of the weye, so pryketh hym his corn,
Til he a lasshe have of the longe whippe;
Than thynketh he, "Though I prounce al byforn--
First in the trays, ful fat and newe shorn,
Yet am I but an hors, and horses lawe
I moot endure, and with my feres drawe";
So ferde it by this fierse and proude knyght: (I.218-25)

50 Tr. Gordon, p. 32.

51 "As the rose surpasses the violet in beauty, so was she fairer than any other lady." Gordon, p. 27. For other examples of the same type of comparison, see supra. p. 65.

The imagery of the war-horse is especially appropriate in setting the tone for Troilus' portrait. A hero in one area, he nevertheless learns by bitter experience his subjection to the laws of human nature--his own weakness and his dependence upon others. From Troilus' sad experiences, the narrator exhorts all potential lovers to follow rather than resist their inclination.

The yerde is bet that bowen wole and wynde,
Than that that brest; and therefore I yow rede
To folowen hym that so wel kan yow lede. (I. 257-9)

Skeat finds the concept in the fable of the Oak and the Reed;⁵² Chaucer uses it again in a more detailed simile in Book II (1387-93).

Probably from the Filostrato Chaucer borrows the idea for the following simile:

Thi lady is, as frost in wynter moone (I. 524)

Boccaccio's version is more detailed: ". . . she for whom thou weepst feels no more than a stone, and remains as cold as ice hardening under a clear sky . . ." ⁵³ Each is appropriate to its setting; Chaucer concentrates on the aspect of coldness--but frost is quickly melted in contact with warmth--whereas Boccaccio's Troilo apprehends hardness as well as cold. The lover's plight described in the

52 II, 463.

53 Tr. Gordon, p. 37.

following line, by using the same type of imagery, stresses the idea of weakness:

And thow fardon, as snow in fire is soone. (I. 525)

This is almost exactly the reading in Boccaccio: "And I am consumed like snow in the fire."⁵⁴

Pandarus' series of comparisons, substantiating his claim to be a guide in love affairs, is not taken from the Filostrato. Skeat considered it "largely original," but source hunters have since uncovered literary predecessors.

Pandarus' words,

A wheston is no kervyng instrument,
But yet it maketh sharppe kervyng tolis (I. 631-2)

call to mind Horace's simile in Ars Poetica: "So I'll play a whetstone's part, which makes steel sharp, but of itself cannot cut."⁵⁵ In this case, the whetstone is critic vis-a-vis the writer. After the initial comparison, Pandarus reiterates his point relentlessly: wise men may be helped by fools; sweetness is known only by one who knows bitterness; joy is proved by sorrow, white by black, worthiness by shame--in short, all things are known by their contraries. This pattern had already been traced at length in the Roman

⁵⁴ Tr. Gordon, p. 37.

⁵⁵ Tr. H. Rushton, Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica London, Wm. Heinemann, 1926, p. 975.

de la Rose⁵⁶ and succinctly summarized in a gloss to Boethius' Consolatio III, m. 1: "Namque per oppositum noscitur omne bonum."⁵⁷

In passing, Pandarus employs a negative comparison to sum up his case:

I have no cause, I woot wel, for to sore
As doth an hawk that listeth for to pleye. (I. 671-2)

The comparison, commonplace enough, seems to have been Chaucer's.

Most of Pandarus' preaching to Troilus utilizes comparisons which are traditional and proverbial. The following example seems to have enjoyed wide circulation during the Middle Ages:

Or artow lik an asse to the harpe,
That hereth sown whan men the strynges plye,
But in his mynde of that no melodie
May sinken hym to gladen, for that he
So dul ys of his bestialite? (I. 731-35)

The initial phrase is taken directly from Boethius (I, pr.2). Haeckel lists the expression as proverbial, but the French and English analogues he assembles picture the animal playing an instrument: "Like a sow playing on a trump"--Hazlitt, No. 271; "A quoi peut-etre vous etes style comme un ane a jouer du flageolet"--Le Roux. Another from the latter source is closer to Chaucer's version: "Un asne n'entend rien en

56 Lines 637 f. Cited by Koepfel, Op. Cit., p. 241.

57 Robinson, p. 816.

musique."⁵⁸ An example of the same simile in a medieval sermon suggests that the comparison was commonplace:

But what savour hathe a synnefull man in prechyng?
For-soth, litill or noon; no, but as a nasse hathe
in pipynge. Bartholomeus, De Proprietatibus Rerum,
seyþ how þat a nasse had ryght good lykynge in ys
mete, and he hard a pipe or a trumpe, anone he wille
lyfte is hed oute of þe maw/n/gere and be full glad
in is kynde as lon/g/ as þat he hereþ itt. But anon
as þat he hereþ þat þe pipe or þe trumpe is sesed,
þan anon he putteþ down, is hed ageyn to is mete and
thenkeþ no more þer-of.⁵⁹

Although W. C. Ross, the editor of the sermons from whose work the quotation is extracted, regrets that he cannot trace the citation to any passage in Bartholomeus' work, the fact that the author thought he was quoting points to the status of the simile as traditional.

A series of parallel situations is cited to demonstrate the paradox that the same Criseyde who causes woe will likewise be the bringer of comfort:

For thilke grownd that bereth the wedes wikke
Bereth ek thise holsom herbes, as ful ofte
Next the foule netle, rough and thikke,
The rose waxeth swoote and smothe and softe;
And next the valeye is the hil o-lofte;
And next the derke nyght the glade morwe;
And also joie is next the fyn of sorwe. (I. 946-52)

Shannon suggests that Chaucer may have derived the initial idea for this pattern from Ovid's statement: "Terra

⁵⁸ Haeckel, Op. Cit., p. 33.

⁵⁹ Middle English Sermons, E.E.T.S. O.S. 209, London, Oxford University Press, 1940, p. 146.

salutares herbas eademque nocentes nutrit, et urticae proxima saepe rosast."⁶⁰ The development by Chaucer is typical of the medieval style which often included such series of parallels.

Another basically horticultural parallel is seen in the simile that follows:

Ek wostow how it fareth of som servise,
As plaunte a tree or herbe, in sondry wyse,
And on the morwe pulle it up as blyve,
No wonder is though it may never thryve. (I. 963-6)

Robinson traces the origin of this simile to Albertanus of Brescia who, in his De Amore Dei, quotes the sentence from an epistle of Seneca: "Non convalescit planta que sepe transfertur."

The last fully developed simile of Book I is basically as old as the New Testament and perhaps much older. It is often cited by critics to demonstrate Chaucer's dependence upon Geoffrey of Vinsauf.

For everi wight that hath an hous to founde
He renneth naught the werk for to bygynne
With rakel hond, but he wol bide a stounde,
And sende his hertes line out from withinne
Aldirfirst his purpos for to wynne.
Al this Pandare in his herte thoughte
And caste his werk ful wisely or he wroughte.
(I. 1065-71)

Geoffrey of Vinsauf had described the poetic process in the same terms:

60 Shannon, Op. Cit., p.125

The hand that seeks a proper house to raise
 Turns to the task with care; the measured line
 Of th'inmost heart lays out the work to do,
 The order is prescribed by the inner man,
 The mind sees all before a stone is laid,
 Prepares an archetype

 So in the poet's secret mind the plan
 Unwitting grows, and only when 'tis grown
 Comes poetry to deck the frame with words.⁶¹

In the second book of the Troilus Chaucer continues his frequent use of simile, relying heavily, especially in the first part, upon the implied comparison in which the terms are merely juxtaposed. He excuses himself for lack of ability when it comes to writing about love:

No wondre is, for it nothyng of newe is;
 A blynd man kan nat juggen wel in hewis. (II. 20-21)

Both Skeat and Haeckel list this as proverbial. Likewise the next comparison, used by Virgil and Dante, probably dates from time immemorial:

For nevere yet so thikke a swarm of been
 Ne fleigh, as Grekes fro hym gonne fleen. (II. 194-5)

The next example, although not strictly a simile, nevertheless functions in a way recalling the series of parallels cited above:

Wo worth the faire gemme vertuless!
 Wo worth the herbe also that dooth no boote!
 Wo worth that beaute that is routheles!
 Wo worth that wight that tret ech undir foote!
 And yet, that been of beaute crop and roote,
 If therewithal in yow ther be no routhe,
 Then is it harm ye lyven, by my trouthe! (II. 344-50)

61 J. A. W. Bennett, Op. Cit., p. 5.

The entire passage is phrased as a threat--if Criseyde should be without pity, then she would be comparable to the gem without virtue, etc.

Chaucer relies upon the context to supply one term for the comparison implied in the short pithy question of Pandarus as he attempts, rhetorically, to allay the fears of Criseyde that she would be criticized if Troilus were seen coming and going:

What? who wol demen, though he se a man
To temple go, that he th'ymages eteth? (II. 372-3)

The same sense of simile without overt comparison emerges from the observation inserted in Troilus' desperate prayer bemoaning the agony of secrecy in regard to his love:

And wel the hotter ben the gledes rede,
That men hem wrien with asshen pale and dede. (II.538-9)

Chaucer uses the same comparison, made explicit by the word as in the story of Thisbe:

As, wry the glede, and hotter is the fyr;
Forbede a love, and it is ten so wod. (LGW, 735-6)

Skeat has pointed out the similarity of this passage and Ovid's phrase in Metamorphoses, IV, 64: "Quoque magis aestuat ignis."⁶²

Another implied simile in Pandarus' speech compares Criseyde with a gem:

62 Skeat, III, 315.

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And, be ye wis as ye be fair to see,
Well in the ryng than is the ruby set,
Ther were nevere two so wel ymet. (II. 584-5)

This is taken directly from the Filostrato, in which Pandaro uses two comparisons instead of one: "Well is the gem set in the ring, if thou art wise as thou art fair. If thou become his, as he has become thine, well will the star be joined with the sun . . ." ⁶³

Criseyde's reflection upon the reasons for accepting Troilus' love includes an implied simile which, according to Koepfel, may be compared with a passage from the Roman de la Rose:

In every thing, I woot, there lith mesure,
For though a man forbede dronkenesse,
He naught forbet that every creature
Be drynkeless for alwey, as I gesse. (II. 715-18)

The parallel passage from the Roman, in modern translation, is as follows:

. and you should understand
Me to forbid no love except that kind
Which can but wound those folk who harbor it.
So if from drunkenness I should you warn,
I would not say you must not drink at all. ⁶⁴

The first fully explicit and extended simile used by Chaucer in Book II seems to have been taken from Boethius:

⁶³ Tr. Gordon, p. 44.

⁶⁴ Cited by Koepfel, Op. Cit., p. 242. Tr. Harry Robbins, p. 121.

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But right as when the sonne shyneth brighte
 In March, that chaungeth ofte tyme his face,
 And that a cloude is put with wynd to flighte,
 Which oversprat the sonne as for a space,
 A cloudy thought gan thorough hire soule pace,
 That overspradde hire brighte thoughtes alle,
 So that for feare almost she gan to falle. (II. 764-70)

The parallel passage in the Consolatio presents a slightly different image:

And ryght by ensauple as the sonne is hydd whan the
 sterres ben clustered (that is to seyn, whan sterres
 ben covered with cloudes) by a swift wynd that hyghte
 Chorus, and that the firmament stant dirked with wete
 plowngy cloudes; and that the sterres nat apeeren
 upon hevене, so that the nyght semeth sprad upon
 erthe; yif thanne the wynd that hyghte Boreas, isent
 out of the kave of the cuntre of Trace, betith this
 nyght (that is to seyn, chaseth it away), and dis-
 covereth the closed day, thanne schyneth Phebus
 ischaken with sodeyn light, and smyteth with his
 beemes in merveylynge eien. (I. m.3. 4 f.)⁶⁵

Chaucer depicts brightness overshadowed by cloud; Boethius speaks of light emerging after darkness.

The two implied similes which follow rely entirely upon juxtaposition of terms for their effect. Criseyde considers the dangers to reputation which may be involved in consenting to love:

And who may stoppen every wikked tonge,
 Or sown of belles whil that thei ben ronge? (II. 804-5)

Here a pair of co-ordinate elements are seen as comparable.

The same effect is achieved in Antigone's song:

65 Robinson, p. 322.

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What is the sonne wers, of kynde right,
 Though that a man, for feeblesse of his yen,
 May nought endure on it to see for bright?
 Or love the wers, though wrecches on it crien?
 (II. 862-5)

Antigone follows the same procedure of implying comparison among elements by setting them out in a pattern of co-ordination:

But wene ye that every wrecche woot
 The parfite blisse of love? Why, nay, iwys!

 Men mosten axe at seyntes if it is
 Aught fair in hevene (why? for they kan telle),
 And axen fendes is it foul in helle. (II. 890-6)

The second full-fledged simile of Book II is taken directly from Boccaccio, who borrowed from Dante:

But right as floures, thorough the cold of nyght
 Iclosed, stoupen of hire stalke lowe,
 Redressen hem ayein the sonne bright,
 And spreden on hire kynde cours by rowe,
 Right so gan tho his eighen up to throwe
 This Troilus . . . (II. 967-71)

As little flowers that droop and close in the chill
 of night all open out and stand straight upon their
 stalks when the sun brightens, so was it with
 Troilus' weary spirit.⁶⁶

As little flowers, bent down and closed by the frost
 of night,
 stand up, all open on their stems,
 when the sun comes back to warm and brighten them,

so I revived my failing strength,
 and so much boldness rushed into my heart
 that I began like one set free, (Inferno, II,127-32)⁶⁷

66 Il Filostrato, tr. Gordon, p. 49.

67 Tr. Huse, p. 16.

The next three comparisons are merely implied, yet they seem to be just as effective as explicit similes. A lover who is told to wait patiently is like a hanged man.

Thow maist answer, 'abid, abid,' but he
That hangeth by the nekke, soth to seyne
In gret disese abideth for the peyne. (II. 985-7)

Pandarus' advice about writing love letters identifies him as a devotee of Horace:

And if thow write a goodly word al softe
Though it be good, reherce it noght to ofte.
For though the beste harpour upon lyve
Wolde on the beste sowned joly harpe
That evere was, with all his fynGRES fyve,
Touch ay o streng, or ay o werbful harpe,
Were his nayles poynted nevere so sharpe,
It sholde maken every wight to dulle,
To here his glee, and of his strokes fulle.(II.1028-36)

Horace speaks rather of making the same mistake repeatedly, not just harping on the same string:

As a copying clerk is without excuse if, however much warned, he always makes the same mistake, and a harper is laughed at who always blunders on the same string; so the poet who often defaults . . .
(Ars Poetica, 355)

The influence of Horace is even more direct in the next instance. Pandarus stresses the importance of form and of consistency in writing:

. . . hold of thi matere
The forme alwey, and do that it be lik;
For if a peyntour wolde peynte a pyk
With asses feet, and hede it as an ape,
It cordeth naught, so nere it but a jape.(II. 1039-43)

If a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse, and to spread feathers of many a hue over limbs picked up now here now there, so that what at

the top is a lovely woman ends below in a black and ugly fish, could you, my friends, if favoured with a private view, refrain from laughing? (Ars Poetica, 1-5)

The third explicit simile of Book II is proverbial in nature and taken by Chaucer directly from Boccaccio:

But as we may alday oureselven see,
Thorough more wode or col, the more fir,
Right so encrees of hope, of what it be,
Therwith ful often encresseth ek desir. (II. 1331-34)

The parallel passage in the Filostrato reads: "But as we see every day, the more wood the greater the fire, so when hope grows, love too very often increases."⁶⁸

Also embodying a proverb is the next short simile in the voice of the narrator:

Or as an ook comth of a litel spir,
So thorough this lettre, which that she hym sente,
Encressen gan desir, of which he brente. (II. 1335-7)

Robinson credits Koepfel with finding a parallel simile in Alanus de Insulis' Liber Paraboliarum: "De nuce fit corylus: de glande fit ardua quercus."

Pandarus uses nature imagery in a series of similes, some explicit, some implied:

So reulith hire hir hertes gost withinne,
That though she bende, yeet she stant on roote.
.....
Thenk here-ayeins: what that the stordy ook,
On which men hakketh ofte, for the nones,
Receyved hath the happy fallyng strook,
The greete sweigh doth it come al at ones,
As don these rokkes or these milnestones;
For swifter cours comth thyng that is of wighte,
Whan it descendeth, than don thynges lighte.

⁶⁸ Tr. Gordon, p. 40.

And reed that boweth down for every blast,
 Ful lightly, cesse wynd, it wol aryse;
 But so nyl nought an ook, whan it is cast;
 It needeth me nought the longe to forbise,
 Men shal rejoissen of a gret empyrse
 Acheved wel, and stant withouten doute,
 Al han men ben the lenger therabout. (II. 1377-93)

The first implied simile depicts Troilus' fears in which he likens Criseyde to a plant that will bend but remain steadfast (in her refusal). This picks up the principle stated by the narrator in Book I that it is better to "bowen" than to "brest" (257-8); it likewise prepares for the presentation of Criseyde's favor in terms of a sturdy oak which does eventually yield to persistent effort. The very magnitude of the quest enhances the victory. Once felled, the oak cannot arise again as can the bending reed. The basic comparison is, of course, proverbial, but Chaucer shows skill in following through the details to present such a plausible argument on the part of Pandarus.

The last example of simile in Book II is brief and inconsequential. So eager is Deiphebus to befriend Criseyde that refusal is inconceivable.

To be hire fulle frend with al his myght;
 But swich a nede was to praye hym thenne,
 As for to bidde a wood man for to renne. (II. 1552-4)

In Chaucer's time, such a simile was probably as much a cliché as is the modern counterpart, "Can a duck swim?"

Book II, although seeming to contain more similes than Book I, nevertheless relies almost exclusively upon the

implied comparison. The few examples of extended simile are directly traceable to either Boccaccio or Boethius. Yet Chaucer seems to depend increasingly upon this figure of speech to enrich meaning.

Book III contains about a dozen similes, some taken immediately from predecessors and others adapted with considerable originality. The first example of the latter type, used again by Chaucer in the Squire's tale, appears in an account of Pandarus' grief:

And Pandare wep as he to water wolde. (III. 115)

The same idea had been used quite literally by Ovid in the story of Arethusa:

Till wasted by her tears, her substance spent,
The queen of waters all to water went. (Met. V. 108-9)

Even to suggest such a metamorphosis for Pandarus adds a note of hyperbole perfectly in accord with his entire characterization.

Directly from Boccaccio comes the account of Troilus' rebirth upon hearing that he will at last encounter Criseyde intimately.

But right so as thise holtes and thise hayis
Than han in wynter dede ben and dreye,
Revesten hem in grene, when that May is,
Whan every lusty liketh best of pleye;
Right in that selve wise, soth to seye,
Wax sodeynliche his herte ful of joie,
That gladder was ther nevere man in Troie. (III.351-7)

And just as the newly-come spring suddenly reclothes with leaves and blossoms the little trees which had

stood bare in the harsh season, and makes them beautiful, and reclothes the meadows and hills and every riverside with grass and fair new flowers, so did Troilus, swiftly full of new joy, laugh with happy countenance.⁶⁹

A comparison which gives the effect of mere hyperbole rather than genuine simile occurs in the following passage:

Ne shold han wist, by word or by manere,
What that he mente, as touchyng this matere.
From every wight as fer as is the cloude
He was, so wel dissimulen he koude. (III. 431-4)

The phrase "as fer as is the cloude" is of the same variety as the one used by the Psalmist to express the mercy of God: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him." (Ps. 102)

The section of the story devoted to Pandarus' preliminary visit to Criseyde to win admittance for Troilus contains three examples of implied simile. The first of these seems to have been original with Chaucer:

Nece, alle thyng hath tyme, I dar avowe,
For whan a chaumbre afire is, or an halle,
Wel more nede is, it sodeynly rescowe
Than to dispute and axe amonges alle
How this candele in the strawe is falle. (III. 855-9)

Perhaps no passage is more typical of Pandarus' homely brand of logical reasoning.

The other two examples of implied simile at this point are of the patterned type noted frequently in Book II.

69 Tr. Gordon, p. 59.

The first presents the narrator's hope that joy may follow misunderstanding.

But now help God to quenchen al this sorwe!
 So hope I that he shal, for he best may.
 For I have seyn, of a ful misty morwe
 Folowen ful ofte a myrie someris day;
 And after wynter foloweth grene May.
 Men sen alday, and reden ek in stories,
 That after sharpe shoures ben victories. (III. 1058-64)

Both Haeckel and Skeat call this passage proverbial and cite numerous analogues. The latter quotes a similar passage from Piers Plowman:

Clarior est solito post maxima nubila Phebus,
 Post inimicitias clarior est et amor,
 After sharpe shoures most shene is the sonne.⁷⁰

Similarly proverbial is the passage which echoes approximately the same idea, but which juxtaposes joy and sorrow in a framework of causal relationship:

O, sooth is seyde, that heled for to be
 As of a fevre, or other gret siknesse,
 Men moste drynke, as men may ofte se,
 Ful bittre drynke, and for to han gladnesse,
 Men drynken ofte peyne and gret distresse;
 I mene it here, as for this aventure,
 That thorough a peyne hath founden al his cure.
 (III. 1212-18)

Hazlitt's Proverbs include a most succinct statement of the same sentiment: "Bitter pills may have sweet effects."⁷¹

At the climax of Book III, the consummation scene, Chaucer uses a simile which not only precludes any sense of

70 Early English Proverbs, No. 154, p. 64.

71 Ibid., No. 183, p. 76.

disgust on the part of the reader but positively reveals the superior delicacy of the author beside Ovid from whom he may have borrowed the idea. The Chaucerian version reads:

And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste,
Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,
Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde. (III. 1230-32)

In Book IV of the Metamorphoses, Ovid pictures Hermaphrodite captured by Salamacis: "So will the ivy round some lofty tree its tendrils twine."⁷² But in Ovid this beautiful imagery appears between two other similes which somewhat destroy the sense of beauty and delicacy:

So will the serpent, seized and lifted high
By the king bird, and dangling in the sky,
Encoil the captor with its tail, and cling
Round feet and head and wide-extended wing;
: : : : : and so, beneath the sea,
The octopus, extending every way
Its whiplash arms will seize and hold the prey.

Although it is true that the context is better served by Chaucer's use of one, Ovid's use of three similes, the comparison of these passages illustrates a basic difference in the use of simile by the two authors. Repeatedly Ovid reinforces a concept by the use of several similes, striking in themselves, but unrelated in subject matter and tone with one another. Chaucer tends to rest his case upon one striking comparison at a time or upon a pattern of parallel comparisons drawn from homogeneous imagery.

⁷² Tr. A. E. Watts, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1964, p. 81.

The next simile, one of Chaucer's most delicately phrased, seems to have been original, as no sources are cited by editors:

And as the newe abaysed nyghtyngale
 That stynteth first when she bygynneth to synge,
 Whan that she hereth any herde tale,
 Or in the hegges any wyght stiryng,
 And after siker doth hire vois out ryng,
 Right so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente,
 Opened hire herte, and told hym hire entente.
 (III. 1233-39)

Both this and the following simile seem to exemplify Chaucer's Dantean technique.

And right as he that seth his deth yshapen,
 And dyen mot, in ought that he may gesse,
 And sodeynly rescous doth hym escapen,
 And from his deth is brought in sykernesse,
 For al this world, in swych present gladnesse
 Was Troilus, and hath his lady swete. (III. 1240-5)

A tone of indignant apostrophe marks the last explicit simile of Book III:

Lord, trowe ye a coveytous or a wrecche,
 That blameth love, and halt of it despit,
 That of the pens that he kan mokre and krecche
 Was evere yit yyeven hym swich delit
 As is in love, in o poynt, in some plit?
 Nay, douteles, for also God me save,
 So perfit joie may no nygard have. (III. 1373-79)

Two other implied similes appear towards the end of Book III. The first sets out a series of impossible events which must take place before Criseyde will be unfaithful to Troilus. There is implied comparison among impossible situations, but the total effect of the passage is less that

simile than mere development of topoi, exemplifying the pattern which Curtius labels "the world upside down."⁷³ The other example is basically a metaphor--Criseyde's love as a net--but the detailed development creates a sense of simile:

The goodlihede or beaute which that kynde
 In any other lady hadde yset
 Kan nought the montance of a knotte unbynde
 About his herte, of al Criseydes net.
 He was so narwe ymasked and yknet,
 That it undon on any manere syde
 That nyl naught ben for aught that may bitide.
 (III. 1730-36)

The basic comparison forms a consistent pattern of imagery in the Filostrato.

From the examples examined in Book III, it appears evident that Chaucer had matured in the use of simile so that he was equally adept at incorporating extended simile from source material into his own work and composing original similes which were equally striking. The number of similes in Books II and III point to Chaucer's reliance upon this figure as one vehicle of elaboration, particularly of the scenes in which he probes the psychological aspects of the story.

For the same reason, then, Book IV, with its depiction of anxiety and grief, calls for more of the same rhetorical practice. In this book, however, Chaucer relies

⁷³ European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, tr. Willard Trask, New York, Pantheon Books, 1953, p. 94.

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more consistently upon his source material and introduces fewer similes of an original nature.

Scholars have given much attention to the first simile of Book IV:

The noyse of people up stirte thanne at ones,
As breme as blase of straw iset on-fire. (IV. 183-4)

The "noyse of people" has been taken to refer to the Peasants' Revolt and the "blase of straw" to contain a pun on the name of Jack Straw.⁷⁴

The next simile seems undoubtedly to be an imitation of a passage from Dante, as Skeat and Robinson suggest:

And as in wynter leves ben biraft,
Ech after other, til the tree be bare,
So that ther nys but bark and braunche ilaft,
Lith Troilus, byraft of ech welfare. (IV. 225-8)

The parallel passage in the Inferno reads as follows:

As in autumn the leaves fall
one after the other, until the branch
sees all its spoils upon the ground,
so, the evil seed of Adam
fell to that shore, one by one . . . (III, 112-6)⁷⁵

The simile is especially forceful in view of the Dantean context. Troilus is implicitly compared with the souls entering the infernal region, about to be ferried by Charon.

The lengthy comparison of Troilus' actions to those of a mad bull likewise may be traced ultimately to Dante,

74 C. Brown, Modern Language Notes, Vol. 26, 208 f.

75 Tr. Huse, p. 21.

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but Chaucer undoubtedly took it directly from Il Filostrato (IV. 27) which compares man with bull rather than Minotaur with bull.

As a bull that breaks loose at the moment
when it receives a mortal blow
and cannot go straight, but plunges here and
there 76
so I saw the Minotaur stagger . . . (Inf. XII,22-5)

. . . . he seemed not a man but a furious animal. Not otherwise does the bull go leaping now here, now there, after it has received the mortal stroke, and roaring in misery shows what pain has come upon it, then did Troilo, flinging himself down and wildly striking his head against the wall, and his face with his hands, his breast and aching arms with his fists. His sad eyes, pitying his heart, wept sorely and seemed two fountains that cast out abundant water.⁷⁷

Chaucer's version includes all the main details used by Boccaccio:

Right as the wylde bole bygynneþ sprynge,
Now her, now ther, idarted to the herte,
And of his deth roreth in compleynynge,
Right so gan he aboute the chaumbre sterte,
Smytyng his brest ay with his fistes smerte;
His hed to the wal, his body to the grounde,
Ful ofte he swapte, hymselfen to confounde. (IV. 239-45)

The Chaucerian comparison of Troilus' eyes to "swifte welles tweye" (IV. 247) reproduces Boccaccio's "two fountains" in the passage quoted above. Again, the description of Troilus in grief, who

Gan as the snow ayeyn the sonne melte (IV. 367)
follows closely the phrasing of Il Filostrato in an earlier context: "and I am consumed like snow in the fire."⁷⁸

76 Tr. Huse, p. 59.

77 Tr. Gordon, p. 73

78 Ibid., p. 37.

The source of the next simile has been traced by Shannon to Ovid's Remedia Amoris. Chaucer has Pandarus rationalize:

For also seur as day comth after nyght,
The new love, labour, or oother wo,
Or elles selde seyng of a wight,
Don olde affeccions alle over-go. (IV. 421-24)

Shannon observes that Chaucer does not exactly follow Ovid's order. The parallel passages he cites are as follows:

Ergo ubi visus eris nostrae medicabilis arti,
Fac monitis fugias otia prima meis. (Rem. Am., 135-6)

Qui finem quaeris amoris,
(Cedit amor rebus) res age; tutus eris. (Ibid., 143-4)⁷⁹

By implication Troilus evokes a comparison between love and a game, denying that the rules of one apply to the other.

But kanstow playen raket, to and fro,
Nettle in, dok out, now this now that, Pandare?
(IV. 460-1)

Skeat has traced this passage to "a charm for curing the sting of a nettle repeated whilst the patient rubs in the juice from a dock-leaf."⁸⁰ One version of this charm reads:

Nettle in, dock out - Dock in, nettle out,
Nettle in, dock out - Dock rub nettle out.

Chaucer speaks of "playen raket"; perhaps the balance rhythm of the charm suggested the game to him.

79 Op. Cit., p. 142-3.

80 Skeat, II, 488.

The next simile, according to Skeat, is probably traceable to the Roman de la Rose:

This Troylus in teris gan distille
As licour out of a lambic ful faste. (IV. 519-20)

Je vois maintes fois que tu plores
Cum alambic sus alutel. (Roman de la Rose, 6406-7)⁸¹

The humorous simile depicting the futile efforts of the women to comfort Criseyde comes directly from Il Filostrato. Chaucer writes:

And to be glad they often hire bysoughte
But swich an ese therwith they hire wroughte,
Right as a man is esed for to feele,
For ache of hed, to clawen hym on his heele! (IV. 725-8)

Boccaccio's version reads: "and this was as if they had scratched her heels when her head itched."⁸² As Meech observes, Chaucer's version is more dignified, though less congruent.⁸³

Criseyde's tears falling from her "eyen two" "as shour in Aperil ful swithe" warrant no special notice, as the comparison seems commonplace. Nor is the best implied simile more original:

To what fyn sholde I lyve and sorwen thus?
How sholde a fissh withouten water dure?
What is Criseyde worth, from Troilus?

⁸¹ Skeat, II, 488.

⁸² Tr. Gordon, p. 80.

⁸³ Op. Cit., p. 310.

How sholde a plaunte or lyves creature
 Lyve withouten his kynde norriture?
 For which ful ofte a by-word here I seye
 That 'rooteles moot grene soone deye.' (IV. 764-770)

Langland uses the same proverbial theme in a passage reminiscent of this and of Chaucer's "monk out of his cloister."

And seide it in ensauple pat bei shulde do be betere:
 "Whanne fisshes faile be flood or be fresshe watir
 bei di₃e for the drou₃te whanne bei dreie lengen;
 Ri₃t so be religioun; it roilep & steruip
 pat out of couent & cloistre coueiten to libben."
 (Piers Plowman, A. XI. 206-10)⁸⁴

Quite literal, and worthy of Dante, is the comparison of Criseyde laid out to resemble a corpse:

He gan hire lymes dresse in swich manere
 As men don hem that shal ben layd on beere. (IV.1162-3)

The next comparison is likewise literal and even less original:

And to and fro ek ride and gon as blyve
 Alday as thikke as been fleen from an hyve. (IV.1355-6)

The last explicit simile of Book IV is taken directly from Il Filostrato:

And as the briddes, whanne the sonne is shene,
 Deliten in hire song in leves grene,
 Right so the wordes that they spake yfeere
 Delited hem, and made hire hertes clere. (IV. 1432-35)

And as the bird fluttering from leaf to leaf in the new season takes delight in his song, so did they, talking to one another of many things.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ed. Skeat, p. 417.

⁸⁵ Tr. Gordon, p. 87.

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The expression "soth as soone uprist o morwe" (IV. 1143-6) was probably considered as trite in Chaucer's day as it is now.

The last book of the Troilus is almost bereft of simile. Only three examples, two of them implied comparison, can be cited. The first occurs in Criseyde's speech of reminiscence:

Who myghte have seyde that I hadde don amys
To stele away with swich oon as he ys?
But al to late comth the letuarie,
Whan men the cors unto the grave carie. (V. 739-42)

Despite the seriousness of the situation, the tone of this conclusion seems to be as matter-of-fact as the narrator's comment about Arcite's death: "Farewel, physik, go bere the man to chirche." In Criseyde's voice the observation underlines the practical side of her character.

Troilus looks upon Criseyde's final letter with sorrow:

Hym thoughte it lik a kalendes of change. (IV. 1634)
The word kalendes is defined by Robinson as "an introduction to the beginning"; thus the kalends of January comprise the period December 14 to December 31. Quite literally for Troilus is the comparison true.

The last simile of the Troilus is proverbial:

. . . and thynketh al nys but a faire
This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.
(V. 1840-1)

Gower used the same proverb:

For al is bot a chirie-faire
This worldes good, so as thei telle.⁸⁶

But the mutability theme is common to all men; proverbs only re-state the reminder found in Holy Scripture:

Man's days are as grass; he does flourish like the
flower of the field:/ But once the wind passes over
it, it has gone; and its place shall know it no more.
(Ps. 102: 15-6)

In general, Chaucer seems completely at ease in his use of simile throughout the Troilus. Still relying largely upon traditional phrases of comparison and similes derived from Ovid and from the Roman de la Rose, and often borrowing extended passages of comparison from Boccaccio, Dante, and Boethius, he nevertheless evinces an ability to supply original similes when needed. However, similes are never multiplied for mere ornamentation. Functionally, Chaucer's similes help delineate character, make vivid a particular event, or strengthen an argument based upon moral or philosophical principles.

4. The "Boethian Group of Ballades."

Among Chaucer's short poems, which are exceedingly difficult to date, are five ballades which may have been written in close sequence under the influence of the De Consolatione Philosophiae.⁸⁷ Although the philosophical

⁸⁶ Quoted in Early English Proverbs, No. 205, p. 85.

⁸⁷ Robinson, p. 521.

^{moral} and/ideas reflect the thought of Boethius, none of the extended similes of the original work find their way into Chaucer's poems. Only one of the ballades, "Truth," contains a comparison:

Stryve not, as doth the crokke with the wæl. (12)

According to Robinson's notes, this is an allusion to one of Aesop's Fables.

Unlike the strictly Boethian ballades, however, Chaucer's "To Rosemounde," written probably somewhat earlier, contains one interesting simile in addition to two conventional comparisons, "as the cristal glorious ye shyne," and "lyke ruby ben your chekes rounde."

Nas never pyk walwed in galauntyne
As I in love am walwed and ywounde. (17-8)

Skeat glosses this passage in detail:

"Never was pike so involved in galantine sauce as I am completely involved in love." This is a humorous allusion to a manner of serving up pikes which is well illustrated in the Fifteenth-Century Cooking-books, ed. Austin, p. 101, where a recipe for 'pike in Galentyne' directs that the cook should 'cast the sauce under him and above him that he be al y-hidde in the sauce.'⁸⁸

Although Skeat suggests that Chaucer may have been reminded of the word galentine by a passage in the Roman de la Rose, the simile itself seems to be his own invention.

⁸⁸ Skeat, I, 549.

5. The Legend of Good Women.

Chaucer's last major work assigned to this period is the Legend of Good Women. Similes appear less frequently than in the works based upon Boccaccian sources; those which are used are taken largely from Ovid's narratives which constituted Chaucer's chief source for plot material.

Considering its genre, it is not surprising that throughout the Legend are found numerous conventional phrases of comparison such as were characteristic of the Book of the Duchess. Examples in the Prologue include: "as red as rose" (F 110-2); "as the gledes rede," (F 235; G 167); "stille as any ston" (F 310); and "trewe as ever was any steel" (F 332-4). Likewise in the legends themselves occur the following examples: "fayr as is the rose in May" (Cleopatra, 613);⁸⁹ "crewel as lyoun" (Ibid., 627); "thikke as hayl" (Ibid., 665); "pale as box" (Thisbe, 866); "fayrer . . . than . . . the bryghte sonne" (Dido, 1006); "swift as any thought" (Ibid., 1195), "fair as is the bryghte morwe" (Ibid., 1202); "stertlynge as the fyr" (Ibid., 1204); "coy as is a mayde" (Hypsipyle and Medea, 1548); "as real as a leoun" (Ibid., 1605); "fayrer . . . than . . . the flour ageyn the

⁸⁹ Shannon, Op. Cit., p. 185: "Lines 596-615 of the LGW which describe Cleopatra as 'fair as is the rose in May' . . . have, as Schofield has pointed out, a distinctly medieval color." (Schofield, Kittredge Anniversary Paper, p. 139.)

bryghte sonne" (Phyllis, 2426); "trewe as stel" (Hypermetra, 2582); "quok as . . . the lef of aspe grene" (Ibid., 2648); "pale as ash" (Ibid., 2649); and "cold as any frost" (Ibid., 2683). Three times false lovers are likened to traitors-- Theseus, Aeneas, and Jason bear this epithet. The same word traitor is used by a modern translator to render Ovid's perfidie, said of Jason by Medea.⁹⁰ One short comparison describing the whiteness of a palfrey as "paper-whit" is noted by Robinson as unusual; in his note he refers to the poet Dafydd ap Gwilym who applies to the fair skin of a lady the phrase "lliw papir." Once Aeneas is said to be "lik Phebus" (Dido, 1206), but comparison to other mythological characters is infrequent in the Legend.

Of the few real similes found in the Legend of Good Women, most are taken directly from Ovid or assume a purely proverbial form. The first example, however, is exceptional in that it seems to be derived from Il Filostrato:

My word, my work ys knyght so in youre bond
 That, as an harpe obeieth to the hond
 And maketh it sounne after his fyngerynge,
 Ryght so mowe ye oute of myn herte bringe
 Swich vois, ryght as yow lyst, to laughe or pleyne.
 (F 89-93)

Skeat calls this a "fine simile." Robinson notes that besides echoing the first stanzas of the Filostrato, the

⁹⁰ Grant Showerman, tr., Heroides and Amores, London and New York, Macmillan, 1914, p. 145.

passage suggests phrases and concepts from the French poetry of Machaut and others.

The entire presentation of Alceste as she appears with the god of love, although phrased like a simile, actually identifies the lady with the daisy (F 214-20; G 246-52). The passage skilfully depicts the dream metamorphosis in which two separate beings merge into a simple identity in the consciousness of the beholder.⁹¹

The description of "my lady sovereyne" as surpassing all in beauty "as the sonne wole the fyr disteyne" represents a further use by Chaucer of the conventional form of compliment already noted in the Book of the Duchess (821-26). The rebuke of the god of love to the dreamer accusing him of being less worthy than a worm to approach the daisy recalls, according to Skeat, the phrase from Dante, "che noi siam vermi" (Purg. X, 124).⁹²

One of the few references in Chaucer to socio-economic conditions appears in the following comparison:

For he that kynge or lord ys naturel
Hym oghte nat be tiraunt ne crewel,
As is a fermour, to doon the harm he kan. (F 376-8)

⁹¹ For an excellent discussion of Chaucer's technique in this regard, see Robert O. Payne, The Key of Remembrance, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, Chapter 3.

⁹² Skeat, III, 301.

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Generally Chaucer is content to emphasize the positive ideal of nobility; here he specifically eschews the practices of tyrannical farmers in regard to taxes.

The last simile of the Prologue is proverbial in nature:

For why a trewe man, withouten drede
Hath nat to parten with a theves dede;
As a trewe lover oght me not to blame
Thogh that I speke a fals loveere some shame. (F 464-7)

Robinson re-phrases this passage: "An honest man has no participation in the deed of a thief."

The only simile in the story of Cleopatra is of a commonplace nature:

The weddyng and the feste to devyse
To me, that have ytake swich emprise
Of so many a story for to make,
It were to longe, lest that I sholde slake
Of thyng that bereth more effect and charge;
For men may overlade a ship or barge. (616-21)

To someone in Chaucer's position, such a simile would have occurred quite naturally.

Of the three explicit similes in the legend of Pyramus and Thisbe, only one seems to be original with Chaucer. The first comes directly from Ovid:

As, wry the glede, and hotter is the fyr;
Forbede a love, and it is ten so wod. (735-6)

Chaucer made use of the same comparison in Troilus (II.538-9).

The second example demonstrates the manner in which Chaucer added simile not only to clarify an event but also to lend solemnity of tone.

And with a soun as softe as any shryfte,
They lete here wordes thourgh the clifte pace (745-6)

Shannon has commented on Chaucer's procedure in this instance:

He adds now and then little explanations of his own to amplify the ideas. Ovid's murmure minimo (Met. IV, 70), the last murmur of the voices of the lovers through the cleft they had found in the wal between their houses, Chaucer has charmingly interpreted by a comparison with the confessional.⁹³

In the last example, Chaucer has used the basic simile of Ovid and varied it a little. Ovid's account of Thisbe as she discovers the body of Pyramus reads:

She stepped backward and shivered like a lake
Whose surface trembles in a gentle breeze.⁹⁴

Chaucer simplifies the account by writing:

And lik the wawes quappe gan hire herte. (865)

It is interesting to speculate why Chaucer did not use Ovid's simile in describing the death of Pyramus:

While on the ground he lies his blood shoots high
As, when a water-pipe is slightly cracked,
The hissing water cleaves the air in spurts.
The snowy fruit, stained by the scattered spray,
Is changed to red; the root is soaked with blood
And gives the mulberry a scarlet shade.⁹⁵

Judging from most of the examples of similes found in Chaucer's work, it seems logical to conclude that he would

93 Op. Cit., p. 192.

94 Metamorphoses IV, 138-9, tr. Z. Chafee, Jr. in Latin Poetry in Verse Translation, ed. L. R. Lind, Boston Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957, p. 164.

95 Ibid., 125-30, p. 163.

naturally have avoided such a mixture of images for the same reason he selected only the ivy simile from the three figures used by Ovid in the Hermaphrodite story.

Only one simile is found in the legend of Dido, and that one is the traditional likening of the beloved one's final complaint to a swan-song. As noted earlier in connection with Chaucer's use of this simile in the Parliament of Fowls, he merely followed Ovid in accepting a time-honored tradition. The simile is explicit in Heroides, VI, 1-8.

Of the three similes in the Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea, two seem original in phrasing though proverbial in nature; one is taken directly from a literary source.

The first has not been traced by editors to any source:

But certes, it is bothe routhe and wo
 That love with false loveres werketh so;
 For they shal have wel betere love and chere
 Than he that hath abought his love ful dere,
 Or hadde in armes many a blody box.
 For evere as tendre a capoun et the fox,
 Thow he be fals and hath the foul betrayed,
 As shal the good-man that therfore hath payed. (1384-9)

The second has been traced to Guido's Historia,
 Book II:

To Colcos comen is this duc Jasoun,
 That is of love devourer and dragoun.
 As mater appetiteth form alway
 And from forme into forme it passen may. (1580-3)

Robinson notes that in Guido, the application of "sicut appetit materia semper formam" is made to the dissoluteness of woman.

The last simile is merely a reference to the proverbial "bottomless pit."

Or as a welle that were botomles,
Ryght so can false Jason have no pes. (1583-4)

Chaucer's account of the Legend of Lucrece seems to be based largely upon Ovid's account in Fasti, II. The three similes found in Chaucer's version are directly derived from the source material.

And [Tarquinius] caughte to this lady swich desyr
That in his herte brende as any fyr
So wodly that his wit was al forgeten. (1750-2)

In Ovid the passage reads:

Meantime the royal youth caught fire and fury, and transported by blind love he raved. Her figure pleased him and that snowy hue, that yellow hair, and artless grace; pleasing, too, her words and voice and virtue incorruptible; and the less hope he had, the hotter his desire.⁹⁶

The second is almost a literal translation of the source:

And as the se, with tempest al toshake,
That after, whan the storm is al ago,
Yit wol the water quappe a day or two,
Ryght so, thogh that hire forme were absent,
The plesaunce of hire forme was present. (1765-9)

As after a great gale the surge subsides, and yet the billow heaves, lashed by the wind now fallen, so, though absent now that winsome form and far away, the love which by its presence it had struck into his heart remained. (Fasti, II. 775-7)⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Tr. Sir James George Frazer, London, Wm. Heinemann Ltd, 1931, p. 113.

⁹⁷ Idem.

The third example seems less successful in Chaucer than in Ovid:

Ryght as a wolf that fynt a lomb alone,
To whom shal she compleyne, or make mone? (1798-9)

But she trembled, as trembles a little lamb that,
caught straying from the fold, lies low under a
ravening wolf.⁹⁸

The single instance of simile in the Legend of Ariadne, likewise taken from Ovid, is merely implied.

Meker than ye fynde I the bestes wilde! (2198)

Mitius inveni quam te genus omne ferarum. (Her. X. 3)

In the Legend of Philomela, two explicit similes, both from Ovid, are found consecutively.

And therwithal she wepte tenderly,
And quok for fere, pale and pitously,
Ryght as the lamb that of the wolf is biten;
Or as the culver, that of the egle is smiten,
And is out of his claws forth escaped,
Yet it is afered and awhaped,
Lest it be hent eft-sones; so sat she. (2316-22)

The wolf that mauls the lamb will leave it so,
Trembling, and doubtful if it lives or no;
The ringdove, from the greedy claws set free,
With bloodstained plumes still fluttering, so we see.⁹⁹

Of the three similes found in Chaucer's Legend of Phyllis, only one does not come directly from Ovid.

The se, by nyghte, as any torche it brende
For wod, and possith hym now up, now down,
Til Neptune hath of hym compassioun. (2419-21)

98 Tr. Frazer, p. 115

99 Metamorphoses, VI, 527-30, tr. Watts, p. 132.

Although these lines may have overtones of Virgil's description of the storm in Book I of the Aeneid, the likening of the sea lit by lightning to a torch seems to be Chaucer's idea.

The next example is an elaborate version of the proverb, "like father, like son."

And lyk his fader of face and of stature
 And fals of love; it com hym of nature,
 As doth the fox Renard, the foxes sone,
 Of kynde he coude his olde faders wone,
 Withoute lore, as can a drake swimme
 Whan it is caught and caryed to the brymme. (2448-51)

Shannon has pointed out that "this feature of inherited unfaithfulness in love in Demophoon's character . . . more than any other, seems to have impressed Chaucer." He quotes the following passage from Heroides:

De tanta rerum turba factisque parentis
 Sedit in ingenio Cressa relicta tuo,
 Quod solum excusat, solum miraris in illo.
 Heredem patriae, perfide, fraudis agis. (II. 75-78)¹⁰⁰

The basic idea, that animals act according to their nature, had often been used before. In Roman de la Rose several examples are used, including the following:

"Fair son, if one should take a cat brought up
 Never to see a male or female rat
 Or even mouse, and long time feed him well,
 With most attentive care, delicious food,
 And then allow a mouse to come in sight,
 And let the cat escape, naught could prevent
 The cat from running fast to seize its prey."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Op. Cit., p. 289.

¹⁰¹ Tr. Robbins, p. 192-3.

In regard to Phyllis' accusation of Demophoon, "Thogh ye ben harder than is any ston" (2554), Shannon has pointed out an interesting adaptation on the part of Chaucer of the original passage in Heroides. He notes:

Ovid makes Phyllis threaten to throw herself into the sea that Demophoon may soon see her dead body floating in the bay at Athens; and she adds that, though he is harder than iron or adamant, he will say that this was not the way he should have been followed . . . Chaucer has made use of all this except the last line which he omitted, probably feeling that it was off the key for the serious tone of his legend. At any rate, he has incorporated Ovid's comparison "harder than any stoon," without completing the sentence to which it belongs in the Latin or substituting any other for it. It thus becomes a "non sequitur" to the preceding thought and is left dangling in the air. If he appreciated the incongruity of Ovid's witticism he nevertheless seems to have imitated him in indulging in a bit of pleasantry at the very end of this legend. Ovid puts his into the mouth of Phyllis herself at the moment when she is contemplating suicide, while Chaucer's is his own and only incidentally belongs to the story. Whatever artistic blemish there may be, it is greater in Heroides than in the Legend.¹⁰²

Lastly, in the Legend of Hypermnestra there appear only two similes. The first, apparently Chaucer's is proverbial in tone:

The whiche child, of hire natyvyte
To alle thewes good yborn was she
As likede to the goddes er she was born,
That of the shef she sholde be the corn. (2576-9)

The second example of simile comes directly from Ovid:

She rist hire up, and dredfully she quaketh,
As doth the braunche that Zepherus shaketh. (2679-80)

102 Op. Cit., p. 289.

Shannon cites the parallel passage:

Ut leni zephyro graciles vibrantur aristae 103
Frigida populeas ut quatit aura comas. (Her. xiv.39-40)

Chaucer's use of simile throughout the Legend of Good Women is restrained and unobtrusive. Almost all the examples of developed simile seem to be based directly upon his source material. However he did not borrow indiscriminately, for Ovid's tales contain many similes rejected by Chaucer.

Several tendencies noted in Chaucer's use of simile during the "Italian Period" may, if viewed separately, seem divergent. Together, however, they contribute to a firm artistic control. The Knight's Tale gave Chaucer his first period of experimentation with epic simile, but the nature of the story in its transformation from Boccaccian epic to medieval romance prevented the incorporation of more than two or three examples. In the Troilus, Chaucer's work was largely one of elaboration. In more firmly delineating the characters, Chaucer used from Boccaccio what he found appropriate, but the similes he added show selection from many sources and a firm reliance on homely, proverbial simile. The several tales which comprise the Legend of Good Women remain, generally speaking, within the same genre as Ovid's; thus Chaucer closely follows his source material, tending to curtail rather than expand the number of similes. No constant pattern of increase or decrease in the use of simile emerges; the work itself seems to govern Chaucer's usage.

CHAPTER VI

SIMILES IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

Although three of the Tales have already been studied in connection with Chaucer's work written probably before 1387, it seems necessary to abandon all concern for chronology when discussing the Canterbury Tales as a work of art. Even Robinson's general division between the "earlier" tales, 1387-92, and the "later (including the Marriage Group)," 1393-1400,¹ serves no useful purpose in discussing Chaucer's similes. For if anything has appeared constant in Chaucer's use of this figure of speech, it is that his practice depends far more upon the particular genre in which he works and the example set by literary predecessors within that genre than upon any consistent pattern of increasing or decreasing usage. In the works before 1372, he follows in general the spirit of the Roman de la Rose, relying often upon short phrases of comparison, and cites traditional similes in sententious pronouncements or invectives against Fortune. During the so-called "transitional" period, he continues this practice, adding more passages of original simile of the type used by Dante. Within this period, however, the Second Nun's Tale and the tragedies afterward used

¹ Robinson, Works, p. xxix.

in the Monk's Tale depend closely upon source material almost devoid of simile. Apart from selecting among the few which do appear, Chaucer shows little inclination to amplify his account by adding similes. In the third or "Italian" period, the most significant change is Chaucer's occasional use of epic simile, generally derived from Boccaccio. But in the Knight's Tale these borrowings are infrequent, despite the large number of epic similes in the Teseide which he might have used. The more frequent reliance upon Boccaccian simile in the Troilus seems appropriate to the scope and pace of the work. Chaucer's reliance on Ovidian simile in the Legend of Good Women shows a willingness to retain traditional practice within a genre without blindly accepting the more far-fetched imagery of his predecessor.

If Chaucer's practice has been correctly assessed thus far, it would seem profitable to study the Canterbury Tales in groups which are closely related, even though adequately precise classifications can hardly be assigned. Robert O. Payne² has divided the tales into areas which seem useful, although he subdivides them for his purposes more meticulously than is necessary for this study. Payne lists as "Saint's Legends": the Man of Law's Tale, the Clerk's Tale, the Physician's Tale, and the Second Nun's Tale. Although he lists the Prioress' Tale as "Miracle" in a separate

² The Key of Remembrance, A Study of Chaucer's Poetics. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, p. 157 f.

category, the type is closely related to the Saint's Legend and will be here treated as belonging to that group. As Sermons, Payne lists the Pardoner's Tale and the Parson's Tale; to this group will be added the Tale of Melibee which, although not in the genre of sermon, still shares the same homiletic tradition so far as simile is concerned. Payne lists as Romances: The Knight's Tale, the Wife of Bath's Tale, the Squire's Tale, and the Franklin's Tale. The two tales which he calls parodies, Sir Thopas and the Nun's Priest's Tale, may well be studied beside the serious romances, although the two humorous tales parody types of romance not exactly represented in the Canterbury Tales. As Fabliaux, Payne lists the Miller's Tale, the Reeve's Tale, the Summoner's Tale, and the Shipman's Tale. To this group will be added the Manciple's Tale, which Payne classifies as "Fable," and the two tales he lists as "satire," the Friar's Tale and the Merchant's Tale, in which the humor is more grim than that of the bona fide fabliaux.

One further category will be studied immediately after the Prologue, including the Canon's Yeoman's autobiography, and the self-portraits of the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, and the other pilgrims speaking, as it were, off guard in the prologues and end-links.

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1. The Prologue.

No extended similes are given place in the famous portrait gallery which is the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. Even the brief phrases which fix in the imagination some physical or moral quality of the character presented with a superlative example of that quality, or liken his action to one recognizable in the area of general experience, must, strictly speaking be classified as comparisons rather than similes. Only a handful of examples occur in which two figures are compared and the simile per brevitatem exists. Yet the general impression given by the Prologue is that it contains numerous similes; and, indeed, the occurrence of comparisons is, statistically, very high as compared with most of the tales.

The Knight is presented as a man of action par excellence. Only after his exploits and virtues have been detailed does the narrator add the one comparison of his portrait: "And of his port as meeke as is a mayde" (69). There is no pejorative connotation of effeminacy, however; rather the harmony between his prowess in battle and his perfect gentillesse is heightened. The knight is in good company; Skeat cites a similar phrase describing the hero in Arthur: "As curteys as any mayde."³

³ Ed. Furnivall, E.E.T.S., quoted by W. W. Skeat, Oxford Chaucer, V, 8.

The Squire's description is shorter, but four comparisons are used to place him squarely in the tradition of the courtly lover. The "lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse" (81) may repel modern readers, especially if they overlook the word as. But Walter Clyde Curry, who has made an intensive study of the standards of personal beauty in romances of the Middle Ages,⁴ lists among the requirements for the hero: "when his helmet is removed, his golden hair falls down over his shoulders in long curls." Chaucer does not mention the color of the squire's hair. But Curry adds, "It is worthy of note that, though the golden-haired hero is indeed most highly appreciated, yet he of the long black curling hair holds an almost equal place in the affections of the Middle English poets."⁵ Nor was this an innovation in Chaucer's time, for, according to Curry:

The custom of wearing the hair long is of great antiquity, going back to the Gauls, Danes, Saxons, and Britons That hair should curl is absolutely essential to the beauty of both men and women. Such highly appreciated ringlets are, for the most part, described as being crisp, L. crispus, though they are sometimes said to be "crulle."⁶

Curry cites passages from the Mabinogion and the Early South English Legendary documenting these generalizations.

⁴ The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty; as Found in the Metrical Romances, Chronicles, and Legends of the XIII, XIV, and XV Centuries, Baltimore, J. H. Furst, 1916

⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶ Ibid., p. 26; p. 31.

The phrase "embroidered as a meadow" has suggested to editors comparison with the garment of the God of Love in the Roman de la Rose:

For 'twas no silken robe he wore, but one
 Made all of flowers, worked with amorous art.

 Of colors most diverse
 Were flowers worked, blossoms in many a guise
 Placed cunningly:⁷

The next phrase, "fresh as the month of May," is too commonplace to warrant much notice from editors, but Rosemond Tuve has suggested, after examining a number of Horae manuscripts, that the pictorial presentation of May in some such Book of Hours may have been literally described. She concludes, "Perhaps Chaucer's squire was 'as fresh' as a very particular 'month of May.'"⁸

The reference to the nightingale is thematically in keeping with the rest of the passage; parallels are cited by Skeat and Robinson from the Welsh poet, Dafydd Nanmor, from the Sowdon of Babilone, and from the Book of the Knight of Le Tour Landry, indicating that Chaucer's phrase, "He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale," was completely traditional.

⁷ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, The Romance of the Rose, tr. Harry Robbins, ed. Charles W. Dunn, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1962, p. 19.

⁸ Seasons and Months: Studies in a Tradition of Middle English Poetry, Paris, Librairie Universitaire S.A., 1933, p. 186.

No comparisons are used in presenting the Yeoman. The Prioress' description, longer than that of most of the pilgrims, contains only one, "Hir eyen greye as glas." Probably the most complete list of literary analogues of this expression is to be found in Curry's work cited above. In view of the common association of this color of eyes with the courtly love heroine, it is interesting to note that the first citation of it in Curry's study occurs in religious poetry:

Studfaste his [Christ's] loke & symple ay,
His egen clere and somdel gray (Cur. Mun. 18849)⁹

Thus the one comparison in the Prioress' description does not contribute significantly to the controversy about her characterization--whether Chaucer presented her with respect as a good religious or ironically as a courtly love heroine in religious garb.

A large number of comparisons are used to characterize the Monk, the outrider. If they are viewed out of context, they add up to the impression readers have generally conceived of him--the proverbial "monk out of his cloister" who delights in hunting and feasting rather than in the monastic life. While it is true that Chaucer's Monk is

⁹ Curry, Op. Cit., p. 51-2. Curry also notes that the comparison "grey as glas" occurs in Libeaus Desconus, 943, The Erl of Toulous, 343, and Sir Isumbras, 248.

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worldly and obviously lacking in appreciation for true spiritual values, an interesting defense of this character has been suggested by Paul Beichner, C.S.C.,¹⁰ who demonstrates that this Monk fulfilled, according to his natural talents, his charge as "outrider" which called for abilities similar to those of a fund-raising, public relations administrator on a modern campus. This provides some justification for his pursuit of hunting and for his maintenance of a good appearance. As Beichner summarizes his case,

He has many fine horses in the stables under his authority, but like many a man of high position today, he has requisitioned the best of the organization's property for his own use. He is "pulling rank"; he is driving the monastery's Cadillac on the pilgrimage--that horse as brown as a berry, with bridle and bells. Though his arguments for his job are logical, he has succumbed to the occupational disease of those religious who deal with the worldly--worldliness; he has acquired the expensive tastes of his patrons--"men of distinction," who appreciated fine fur and roast swans.¹¹

Yet the "brydel . . . Gynglen . . . as loude as dooth the chapel belle" sounds very much like Wyclif's

worldly priest . . . in pompe and pride, coveitise and envye . . . with fatte hors, and jolye and gaye sadeles, and bridelis ryngyng be the weye, and himself in costly clothes and plure.¹²

¹⁰ "Daun Piers, Monk and Business Administrator," Speculum, Vol. 34 (1959), 611-19, reprinted in Chaucer Criticism, The Canterbury Tales, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, Notre Dame Press, 1960, p. 52-62.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 60.

¹² Works, ed. Arnold, III, 519-20, quoted by Skeat, V, 20.

Although the comparison to a "fish out of water" may not be applicable to an outrider on business for his monastery, as the Monk himself, the narrator, and Father Beichner indicate, yet the results of living outside an element normally conducive to spiritual life and growth are made evident by the portrait of the Monk.

Three comparisons are used in regard to the Monk's personal appearance:

His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
And eek his face, as he had been anynt (198-9)

His eyen stepe, and rolynge in his head,
That stemed as a forneys of a leed; (201-2)

He was nat pale as a forpyned goost. (205)

Curry observes that, judging from the quotations he has found, "kings and monks seem to have been peculiarly subject to the misfortune of having bald pates" and he finds Chaucer's line about the monk humorous.¹³ The description of eyes that "stemed as a forneys of a leed" seems to imply a derogatory tone, especially in connection with the adjective "stepe" (protruding, in this context); but eyes described as "glowing like fresh coals or flaming as the fire" occur also in passages of praise, as for example,

of his ezene scullen fleon furene gleden
(Merlin's prophecy concerning Arthur in
Layamon, 18862)¹⁴

13 Curry, Op. Cit., p. 58.

14 Idem.

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And bothe his Eyen . . . ferden there
 Also cleer brennenge as ony fere 15
 (Said of Christ seen in a vision, Grail, 15.311 f.)

But Curry points out that for the most part "burning eyes are attributed to horrible devils," and he lists numerous examples.¹⁶

Perhaps less ambivalent than the Monk is the Friar, about whom five phrases of comparison appear:

His nekke whit was as the flour-de-lys; (238)

Therto he strong was as a champioun (239)

And rage he koude, as it were right a whelp. (257)

Of double worstede was his semycope,
 That rounded as a belle out of the presse. (262-3)

His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght,
 As doon the sterres in the frosty night. (266-7)

Appeal to the physiognomies known to Chaucer's contemporaries merely reënforces the portrait that Chaucer makes explicit-- e.g., "The lechure ofte-tymes Is whyte of coloure,"¹⁷--but it is unfair to exaggerate the physical description which comprises a relatively small part of this portrait. The comparison to a whelp takes care of the Friar's immorality in one clean stroke; the description of eyes which "twynkled" as stars on a frosty night somewhat counteracts the unsavory character traits. Speirs suggests that in Chaucer's writing

15 Curry, Op. Cit., p. 58.

16 Idem.

17 Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum, ed. R. Steele, E.E.T.S., London, 1898, Part I, p. 224.

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The ribald fabliau attitude to monks and friars as all, simply as such, suspect has been resolved into a completer wisdom and subtler art. . . . Besides suggesting, in implied contrast with the tanned neck of a labouring peasant, the delicate whiteness of the neck of the very able-bodied Friar (the contrast of the two lines is characteristic); the simile of the Fleur-de-lys introduces an almost burlesque effect by which the spirit is lightened from the oppressive triumph of the jolly holidaying scoundrel.¹⁸

The striking image of the Friar's garment, "rounded as a belle out of the presse," seems to have been original; R. W. Frank, Jr., suggests that because Chaucer lived in Aldgate in the midst of the London bell-founders, he would have had the comparison ready at hand. Speirs considers this simile particularly effective.

[The Friar's] predatory covetousness exploits the charity of those who are themselves in direct need of charity. Thus, when at the end, we are presented that excellent simile of the bell with his round, prosperous image, we are already perfectly aware of its immoral basis.¹⁹

A single comparison is included in the short vivid portrait of the ascetic clerk. As if by way of introduction to the scholar's appearance, the narrator says: "As leene was his hors as is a rake." This is followed by the understatement, "And he was nat right fat, I undertake." Coming after the Friar who was as round as a bell and the Monk whose palfrey was "brown as a berry," the Clerk makes a striking contrast.

¹⁸ Chaucer the Maker, London, Faber & Faber, 1951, p. 111.

¹⁹ Idem.

No comparisons appear in the account of the Sergeant of the Law. But the Franklin's portrait includes two comparisons, both of whiteness, which in themselves are utterly conventional. Of the first,

Whit was his berd as is the dayseye; (332)

John Manly has remarked:

Chaucer does not say "white as snow," but "white as a daisy." When one remembers that the English daisy is tipped with red and thinks of the Franklin's beard against the background of his ruddy complexion, the appropriateness of the comparison seems perfect.²⁰

The phrase, "whit as morne milk," a commonplace in medieval romance, lyric poetry, and ballad, contributes, according to Speirs, to the portrait of "a robust ensample of a self-indulgent country gentleman or land-owner in an environment of natural plenty."²¹

No comparisons are used to describe the five guildsmen, the Cook, the Shipman, or the Physician. Even the vivid picture of the Wife of Bath is achieved without need of this figure except to describe her hat which is "As broad as is a bokeler or a targe" (471). Speirs considers the choice of such a term of comparison significant:

The 'bokeler' and the 'targe' not only present an image of the breadth of her hat but, along with the 'paire of spores sharpe', are attributes of her

20 Some New Light on Chaucer, New York, 1926, p. 154.

21 Op. Cit., p. 113.

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masterfulness--that impulse to have the 'maistrye' which, she will later confess, governed her relations with her five husbands.²²

The Parson, although he is presented under the traditional metaphor of shepherd, needs no comparisons for his portrait. Nor does his brother, the Plowman, who is presented as a person of great simplicity.

The Miller, who will later use numerous phrases of comparison in his tale, is described in a passage containing four such phrases in quick succession:

His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,
 And therto brood, as though it were a spade.
 Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
 A werte, and theron stood a toft of herys,
 Red as the brustles of a sowes erys;
 His nosethirles blake were and wyde.
 A swerd and bokeler bar he by his syde,
 His mouth as greet was as a greet forneys. (552-9)

Most of the details of physical appearance contribute to a general impression of repulsiveness, according to the standards of the physiognomists. Curry notes, however, that redness of hair in itself is not necessarily a mark of ugliness, "but in connection with red skin and beard it is to be held in suspicion."²³ He cites evidence that, in Latin and Old French, redness was held in aversion; to this effect he quotes a passage from Secreta Secretorum: "Tho that bene

22 Speirs, Op. Cit., p. 117.

23 Op. Cit., p. 17.

rede men, bene Parceuyngre and trechurus, and full of queyn-
tise, i-likenyd to Foxis."²⁴ Another passage in the second
version of the same work reads: "Red colour ys tokenyngre of
vnwit, & of greet Ire."²⁵ Curry also quotes from the Pro-
verbs of Alfred a passage containing the same idea:

þe rede mon he is a quede
for he wole þe þin iwil rede,
he is a cocher, þef and horeling,
Scolde, of wrechedome is king. (702-5)²⁶

Although Curry says that red beards are not often found in
the romances, he cites a number of instances in which rough
eyebrows, usually of a giant, are compared to the "rough hair
or bristles of a swine (sowe) . . ."²⁷ In regard to over-
sized mouths, he remarks:

Large wide crooked mouths are considered exceedingly
ugly, being sometimes compared to those of mares,
flat-fishes, boars, and hounds. For the most part,
only the mouths of devils, giants, dwarfs, and other
misbegotten monsters are thus described.²⁸

But Chaucer's term of comparison, spade, seems far more in
keeping with the general tone of the passage than these
far-fetched ones.

24 Curry, Op. Cit., p. 19.

25 Ed. Robert Steele, p. 114.

26 Curry, Op. Cit., p. 19.

27 Ibid., p. 17.

28 Ibid., p. 67.

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The description of the Reeve contains three comparisons:

His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn (590)

Ful longe were his legges and ful lene
Ylyk a staf, ther was no calf ysene. (591-2)

They were adrad of hym as of the deeth (605)

Curry points out that a "closely cropped head [was considered] decidedly ugly . . . or, as in the case of Chaucer's Yeoman, . . . at least a sign of low birth."²⁹ The fact that the Reeve was "Tukked . . . as is a frere aboute" may have suggested the additional comparison with the tonsure. The legs as lean as a staff and the fear he inspired help make the Reeve an effective character to balance in appearance the Monk, who was not "pale as a forpynded ghost," but who shared the Reeve's sagacity in business affairs.

Four comparisons contribute to the description of the Summoner:

As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe. (626)

And for to drynken strong wyn, red as blood;
Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood. (635-6)

A gerland hadde he set upon his heed
As greet as it were for an ale-stake. (666-7)

According to Ernest Whitney Martin, "The association of the sparrow with Venus does not occur in the Latin poets" and he

29 Op. Cit., p. 30.

cites rather a passage from Sappho's "Ode to Aphrodite" which may have given rise to the idea:

To thy chariot yoked, fair fleet sparrows draw thee,
Flapping fast their wings; round the dark earth circling
From the lofty heaven down through middle ether
Quickly descending. (Tr. Elizabeth Akers)³⁰

By Chaucer's time, the sparrow was conventionally "Venus sone" (PF, 351). All the rest of the comparisons are in keeping with the initial one: the Summoner drinks heavily with the usual consequences. Even the comparison of his garland retains the consistent imagery, as the ale-stake supporting a garland was, like the ivy bush, the tavern's mark of identification.³¹

Although the character of the Pardoner is made evident mainly through his own confession of hypocritical practices, his personal appearance is also significant, according to the tenets of the physiognomists.

This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,
But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex; (675-6)

Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare. (684)

A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot. (688)

The epithet, "yelowe as wex," was not, in Chaucer's time, necessarily repulsive. Curry suggests that the Pardoner's

³⁰ The Birds of the Latin Poets, Stanford, California, University Press, 1914, p. 165.

³¹ Skeat, V, 54.

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hair is ugly "not because it is as yellow as wax but because it hangs straight and smooth."³² He cites examples of the use of this phrase in other works, including a description of Ajax in the Laud Troy Book:

A louely knyght that het Ayax,
With lokkis faire elow as wax,
Hongyng side aboute his swyre. (15615)³³

In regard to "glarynge eyen," the author of Secreta Secretorum has this to say: "He þat his eghen steryn swyftly, and haues a sharpe sighte, sweche oon is trechour, thef, and vn-trewe."³⁴ And of the voice he says: "And tho that haue the voyce hei, smale and swete and plesaunt, bene nesshe, and haue lytill of manhode, and i-likenyd to women a smale hey stronge voice tokenyth a man lyghtely to be wrethyd."³⁵ The connotative value of the Pardoner's description has been noted by Speirs:

The similes of the hare and the goat, besides defining eyes and voice, connect him with these odd beasts. There is a suggestion of craziness, certainly of abnormality, in the creature which is not entirely the effect in him of drink.³⁶

32 Curry, Op. Cit., p. 13.

33 Idem.

34 Ed. Steele, p. 115.

35 Ibid., p. 231.

36 Op. Cit., p. 120.

Furthermore, in the light of the rest of the Pardoner's description, the animal imagery appears even more devastating. Robert Miller's study of this character leads to the conclusion that he is a "spiritual eunuch," a false ecclesiastic who, instead of generating new progeny for the Kingdom of God rather directs others to spiritual death. "The images of the hare, goat and horse--all common symbols of lechery--do not prevent notice that this man is also described as a eunuch."³⁷ Miller compares his life with the condition of the Eunuchus non Dei described by Bruno Astensis: "By this is signified that no one will enter into the heavenly homeland who, sterile in good works, does not have the organs of spiritual generation and fertility."³⁸

Thus with animal imagery for the lecherous, traits significant to the physiognomists for those with violent passions, conventional courtly phrases for those concerned with chivalry and gentillesse, and homely comparisons for the down-to-earth characters, Chaucer differentiates among the various pilgrims, preserving in each a careful balance between the typical and the individual. Wherever metaphorical

37 "Chaucer's Pardoner, The Scriptural Eunuch, and The Pardoner's Tale," Speculum, Vol. 30 (1955), 180-99, reprinted in Chaucer Criticism, the Canterbury Tales, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, Notre Dame Press, 1960, p. 224.

38 Ibid., p. 226.

comparisons appear, the terms are chosen from a vocabulary connotatively suitable. One of the notable feats achieved by Chaucer in the Prologue seems to be his remarkable flexibility in the use of imagery within a framework of consistent tone.

2. Self Portraits and Dramatic Revelation of Character.

Somewhere between the formal presentation of the pilgrims in the Prologue and the purely narrative technique used in many of the tales lies the dramatic method of Chaucer of revealing character traits either by the conversations of the pilgrims or by more or less extended passages of autobiography. The comparisons used in such sections will be examined briefly.

The Prioress protests in her prologue that she is "But as a child of twelf month oold, or lesse," when it comes to expressing herself; such a simile was used by Jeremias in his vain attempt to evade the mission of prophecy (Jer. 1:6).

The Clerk uses a trite comparison for the span of life, "as it were a twynklyng of an ye," in his reference to Petrarch whose story he tells.

The long prologue of the Pardoner yields only two comparisons:

Thanne peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke,
 And est and west upon the people I bekke,
 As dooth a dowve sittynge on a berne. (395-7)

The comparison of himself with a dove, traditional symbol of innocence and simplicity, underlines the element of hypocrisy in the Pardoner while presenting a valid visual image of his actions.

"Lordynges," quod he, "in chirches whan I preche,
I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche
And rynge it out as round as gooth a belle. (329-31)

The passage is reminiscent of the account of Pandarus "ringing out his proces like a bell" in order to provide plausible reasons for the meeting in the house of Deiphebus.

During the quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner three comparisons occur. In the first instance, "For thogh this Somonour wood were as an hare" (1327), the comparison is similar to the proverbial expression "as mad as a March hare."³⁹ The twenty thousand friars in the devil's keeping fly out "Right so as bees out swarmen from an hyve" (1693). The tail of Satan is described by the Summoner as "Brodder than of a carryk is the sayl" (1687-8). The bee simile is traditional; the latter example may have some affinity with Dante's description of the wings of Satan:

Under each two great wings spread
of a size fitting to such a bird;
I have never seen such sails on the sea.
(Inferno, XXXIV, 46-8)⁴⁰

³⁹ W. W. Skeat, Early English Proverbs, No. 272, p. 115.

⁴⁰ The Divine Comedy, tr. H. R. Huse, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Co., 1954, p. 164.

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Six times the talkative Host resorts to brief comparisons, either literal or purely conventional as figures. His wife is "trewe as any steel" (Merch.T.Ep. 2426); the Nun's Priest "loketh as a sperhawk with his yen" (NPT Ep. 3456); women who deceive men seem to be "as bisy as bees" (Merch.T.Ep. 2421-3); the Clerk rides "as coy and stille as dooth a mayde/ Were newe spoused, sittynge at the bord" (Cl.Prol. 1-3); the Clerk is not to preach "as freres doon in Lente" (Cl.Prol. 12); and the Physician who has just told his tale is "a propre man,/ And lyk a preist" (Introd. to Pard.T. 309-10).

Only once does the Host wax eloquent in an extended simile, and to do so he borrows time-honoured patterns.

Lordynges, the tyme wasteth nyght and day,
 And steleth from us, what pryvely slepyng,
 And what thurgh necligence in oure wakyng,
 As dooth the stream that turneth nevere agayn,
 Descendynge fro the mountaigne into playn.
 Wel kan Senec and many a philosophre
 Biwailen tyme moore than gold in cofre;
 For "los of catel may recovered be,
 But los of tyme shendeth us," quod he.
 It wol nat come agayn, withouten drede,
 Namore than wole Malkynes maydenhede,
 When she hath lost it in hir wantownesse.
 (Introd. to MLT, 20-30)

Skeat cites a simile in the Roman de la Rose which resembles the first comparison:

The tyme that passeth night and day,
 And rest/e/lees travayleth ay,
 And steleth from us so prively,

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As water that down runneth ay,
But never drope returne may. (369 f.)⁴¹

The association of the name Malkyn with maidenhead occurs in Piers Plowman, although the point of the comparison is different:

Unless you lend to the poor when asked
þe ne have no more meryt in messe ne in houres
þanne malkyn of hire maidenhed þet no man desireþ.
(A. Text, I. 157-8)⁴²

The narrator also uses comparisons occasionally in his observations about the pilgrims. He notes that the address of the Host to the Prioress is made "as curteisly as it had been a mayde" (Ep. to Ship.T. 444-6), thereby linking him by imagery to the Knight and the Clerk. The Miller begins his tale "in Pilates voys" (Mill.Prol. 3124); the angered Summoner "lyk an aspen leaf . . . quook for ire" (Sum.Prol. 1666-7); the Host settling the dispute between Miller and Reeve "gan to speke as lordly as a kyng" (Rv.Prol. 3900); and the Host in his quarrel with the Pardoner "gan to swere as he were wood" (Introd. to Pard.T., 287).

The Canon's Yeoman's section will be treated here because, although he includes a short tale within his speech, by far the greater portion of it is his apologia. The first impression which the pilgrims receive of him includes the

⁴¹ Skeat, V, 134.

⁴² Ed. George Kane, London, Athlone Press, 1960, p. 201.

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visual image of a horse and/or rider "of foom al flekked as a pye" (CY Prol. 565) after a chase during which the rider "priked lik as he were wood" (565-6). The appropriateness of the third comparison is obvious:

His forhead droppet as a stillatorie,
Were ful of plantayne and of paritorie. (580-1)

In describing the alchemist's profession, the Canon's Yeoman uses two comparisons. Those who practice alchemy "stynken as a goot" (886); the risks they take are implicitly likened to those of a merchant.

Although this thyng myshapped have as now,
Another tyme it may be well ynow.
Us moste putte oure good in aventure.
A marchant, pardee, may nat ay endure
Trusteth me wel, in his prosperitee,
Somtyme his good is drowned in the see,
And somtyme comth it sauf unto the londe. (944-50)

Within the narrative portion almost no comparisons are used except for one cluster towards the end. Once the canon, trying to convince the priest of his veracity, assures him that he can believe in him "as siker as your Crede" (1044-7). After the priest has seen evidence three times of the alleged power of the canon to turn baser metals into silver, his joy is unbounded.

This sotted priest, who was gladder than he?
Was never brid gladder agayn the day,
Ne nyghtyngale, in the sesoun of May,
Was nevere noon that luste bet to synge;
Ne lady lustier in carolynges,
Or for to speke of love and wommanhede,
Ne knyght in armes to doon an hardy dede,
To stonden in grace of his lady deere,
Than hadde this preest this soory craft to leere.
(1341-50)

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Discoursing again upon the futility of his trade, the Canon's Yeoman refers to those who master the jargon:

They mowe wel chiteren as doon thise jayes (1397),
but he assures his listeners that they will never find success:

Ye been as boold as is Bayard the blynde,
That blondreth forth, and peril casteth noon.
He is as boold to renne agayn a stoon
As for to goon bisides in the weye.
So faren ye that multiplie, I seye. (1413-7)

In regard to this last comparison Charles Muscatine has commented: "The extremely naturalistic characterization of the Yeoman serves the conception of alchemy as a blind materialism."⁴³

The Wife of Bath's Prologue is longer and, in many ways, more significant a part of the Canterbury Tales as a whole than is the folk tale she narrates. Her speech abounds in comparisons, some purely colloquial clichés and others traditional similitudes from Holy Scripture and the writings of the Fathers. Practically all the latter variety have been traced both to their ultimate sources and to works such as Deschamps' Miroir de Mariage which served Chaucer as "Jankyn books." No attempt will be made here to indicate the provenance of each simile; Skeat's and Robinson's notes

⁴³ Chaucer and the French Tradition, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1957, p. 217.

supply references to analogues and Bryan and Dempster's anthology, Sources and Analogues, makes available relevant passages of the original works. But a quick summary will indicate the type of comparison characteristic of the Wife of Bath. Her conventional phrases include: "chidest as a feend" (244); "dronken as a mous" (246); "shynynge as gold" (304); "fressh as is a rose" (448); "looked as a wood leon" (429); "joly as a pye" (456); "synge . . . as any nyghtyn-gale" (458); "Stibourn . . . as . . . a leonesse" (637); "stille as he were deed" (730); "stirte as dooth a wood leoun" (794); and "lay as I were deed" (796). Likewise of a proverbial nature but less commonly found are the following examples:

For as a spaynel she [covetous woman] wol on hym lepe,
Til that she fynde som man hire to shepe. (267-8)

For as an hors I koude byte and whyne. (386)

Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt; (389)

Ne noon so gray goos gooth ther in the lake
As, seistow, wol been withoute make. (269-70)

He is to greet a nygard that wolde werne
A man to lighte a candle at his lanterne;
He shal have never the lasse light, pardee.
Have thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee. (333-6)⁴⁴

I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek
That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,
And if that faille, thanne is al ydo. (572-4)

⁴⁴ Cf. Book of the Duchess, 963 f.

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Lo, goode men, a flye and eek a frere
 Wol falle in every dyssh and eek mateere. (833-6)

And after wyn on Venus moste I thynke,
 For al so siker as cold engendreth hayl,
 A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl. (464-6)

A few of the similes are more fully developed:

Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat;
 For whoso wolde senge a cattes skyn,
 Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in;
 And if the cattes skyn be slyk and gay,
 She wol nat dwelle in house half a day,
 But forth she wole, er any day be dawed,
 To shewe hir skyn, and goon a-caterwawed,
 This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,
 I wol renne out, my borel for to shewe. (348-56)

Thou liknest eek wommenes love to helle,
 To bareyne lond, ther water may nat dwelle.
 Thou liknest it also to wilde fyr;
 The moore it brenneth, the moore it hath desir
 To consume every thyng that brent wole be.
 Thou seyest, right as wormes shende a tree,
 Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde; (371-7)

An implied simile makes reference to St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy, 2:20:

For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,
 He hath nat every vessel al of gold;
 Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse,
 God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse. (99-102)

From Ecclesiasticus 25:16 the Wife borrows another simile:

'Bet is,' quod he, 'thyn habitacioun
 Be with a leon or a foul dragoun,
 Than with a womman usynge for to chyde.' (775-7)

Likewise the proverb later quoted by the Parson appears in the Wife's argument:

'A fair womman, but she be chaast also,
 Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose.' (784-5)

Although it is true that the Wife of Bath is professedly quoting in almost every example cited above, much can be seen of her character by examining the type of repertoire she has memorized and the facility with which she documents arguments on either side by reference to some homely truism or proverb. Animal imagery predominates, even in the similes chosen from Holy Scripture. Women are compared in turn to spaniels, horses, geese, mice, cats, worms, lions, and dragons--usually in the reported argument of her husband during debate. But her scathing criticism of a woman who would not have the prudence to look ahead,

I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek
That that but oon hole for to sterte to,

is particularly well chosen from the viewpoint of comparison. Not only is the lack of forethought a common quality; the woman in question would indeed have the heart of a mouse, according to the Wife's philosophy. No other pilgrim has such a store of similes except the Parson, and he uses his for a different purpose.

3. Saints' Legends and Miracles.

Whereas in the Prologue and the self-portraits studied so far comparisons seem to play a significant role in the delineation of character, in the narratives of Chaucer they tend to contribute less conspicuously. Particularly is

this true of the saints' legends and miracles. The Prioress' Tale, for example, contains only two comparisons, and these are utterly insignificant:

His salte teeris trikkled doun as reyn (674)

And stille he lay as he had been ybounde. (676)

However, the sparsity of comparisons does not mean that the writing is devoid of figurative language, for, as Robert Payne observes, Chaucer employs apostrophe, circumlocutio, epithetum, and determinatio frequently.⁴⁵ Perhaps because in this genre the chief character tends to be a type, generally the abstraction of one or more virtues, rather than an individual, a visual presentation is less often used than a conceptual one; in this case the child represents innocence and simple devotion to Mary.

The few similes found in the Physician's Tale are almost all directed towards a presentation of the heroine. She too is a type, but the convention of superlative beauty and virtue in a woman has its own repertoire of traditional phrases of comparison. The heroine's physical beauty resembles that attributed to Nature herself in the Roman de la Rose.

For right as she [/Nature/] kan peynte a lillie whit,
And reed a rose, right with swich peynture
She peynted hath this noble creature. (32-34)

⁴⁵ Op. Cit., p. 168.

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. 'Twere not right
 That I should give account of Nature's form
 Or of her face, which is more fresh and fair
 Than fleur-de-lis new sprung in month of May.
 The rose upon the branch is not more red;
 And no more white is snow upon a limb.⁴⁶

In the same spirit, but apparently original with Chaucer, is the simile,

And Phebus dyed hath hire tresses grete
 Lyk to the stremes of his burned heete. (37-8)⁴⁷

She is "wis as Pallas" (49) and a model of the virtue of temperance.

Bacus hadde of hir mouth right no maistrie;
 For wyn and youthe dooth Venus encresse
 As men in fyr wol casten oille or greese. (58-60)

Each of the attributes detailed, however, serves a functional purpose in the story. Beauty, wisdom, and chastity in the heroine make credible, at least with a little "suspension of disbelief," this tale whose basic plot is somewhat tenuous. The narrative section of the story uses no comparisons until the end when the maiden's life is compared to an open book (107-9), and the distressed father facing the impasse is seen "with a face deed as asshen colde" (209). As in the Prioress' Tale, emotional stress at the point of catastrophe calls for figurative language.

⁴⁶ Romance of the Rose, tr. Harry W. Robbins, p. 346.

⁴⁷ Skeat, V, 262.

The few similes which describe the heroine of the Clerk's Tale illuminate her moral virtues rather than her physical appearance. In contrast to the way in which Walter has ordered his people to honor his wife "As she an emperours doghter weere" (166), appear the indignities she is forced to suffer arbitrarily at his will. When the indomitably patient Griselda is deprived of her infant,

. . . as a lamb she sitteth meke and stille,
And leet this crueel sergeant doon his wille (538-9).

And when she is repudiated by her husband and evicted, she pleads pathetically for a single garment:

Lat me nat lyk a worm go by the wey" (880)

Both phrases, "as a lamb" and "lyk a worm," are conventional in literature; both derive their force from Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah, the Suffering Servant. Thus although at first sight these comparisons are mere clichés, they help make possible a reading of the Clerk's Tale as an allegory of the Christian life. In striking contrast to the "stormy people" who are addressed as "undiscreet and chaungynge as a fane" (996), and who "lyk the moone . . . wexe . . . and wane" (997), Griselda is "sad and constant as a wal" (1047). The last comparison, applied to the heroine restored to her rightful place of honor, is effective because of its literal quality and avoidance of hyperbole:

She ferde as she had stert out of a sleep,
Til she out of hire mazednesse abreyde. (1059-61)

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Apart from these, the only comparison used in the story is a warning offered to Walter as one of the reasons why he should marry:

And thogh youre grene youth floure as yit,
In crepeth age alwey, as stille as stoon, (120-1)

Jonathan Severs has selected this passage to demonstrate Chaucer's ability to strengthen expressions translated from Petrarch and subsequent French versions of the story.

"Old age follows the flower of youth," says Petrarch, and the French translator expands to "follows and drives away"; both writers say merely that "death is near to every age." Passing through Chaucer's imagination, the phrases emerge charged with poetry; they become expressive of fuller meaning, take on a pictorial power which evokes lively mental images.⁴⁸

Although this may be true as a comment upon Chaucer's choice of the verb crepeth, the phrase "stille as stoon" seems too trite to contribute significantly to the image in this context.

In contrast to the sparsity of similes in the Clerk's Tale is the dense cluster of them found in the Envoi. In it the Clerk seems to meet the Wife on her own ground in the type of comparisons he employs.

Ye archewyves, stondeth at defense,
Syn ye be strong as is a greet camaille;
Ne suffreth nat that men yow doon offense,
And sklendre wyves, fieble as in bataille,
Beth egre as is a tygre yond in Ynde;
Ay clappeth as a mille, I yow consaille. (1195-12)

⁴⁸ The Literary Relationships of Chaucer's Clerkes Tale, Yale Studies in English, Vol. 96, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1942, p. 246.

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In jalousie I rede eek thou hym bynde,
 And thou shalt make hym couche as doth a quaille.
 (1205-6)

Be ay of chiere as light as leef on lynde (1211)

Kittredge has called the envoi "a mock encomium, a sustained ironical commendation of what the Wife has taught."⁴⁹ Much of the "utter felicity of scholarly diction" in what Kittredge calls "such a masterpiece of rhetoric" depends upon the maintenance of a consistent tone; this is achieved largely through the similes which recall the animal imagery in those of the Wife of Bath--wives as camels and tigers; husbands as quails.

The last of the Saints' Legends, The Man of Law's Tale, uses few comparisons for such a lengthy narrative. The version of Nicholas Trivet's Anglo-Norman Chronicle reprinted in Sources and Analogues⁵⁰ is utterly devoid of simile except for one example taken from Scripture and not used by Chaucer until the Parson's Tale. But the story as it appears in the Canterbury Tales is more fully developed than Trivet's version and a few comparisons help to emphasize significant parts of the narrative.

⁴⁹ "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage," Modern Philology, Vol. 9 (1911-12), 435-67. Reprinted in Chaucer Criticism, The Canterbury Tales, Ed. Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, University of Notre Dame Press, 1960, p. 143.

⁵⁰ P. 181 f.

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Little need be said about the five purely conventional phrases, "clerer than is glas" (194); the Sultanness "Like to the serpent depe in helle ybounde!" (361); "he fil atones as a stoon," (670); "as doumb stant as a tree" (1055); and joy which "changeth as the tyde." (1134) Two implied similes appear in the passages describing the grief over Custance's departure and the triumphal welcome given her in Surrye.

I trowe at Troye, whan Pirrus brak the wal
Or Ilion brende, at Thebes the citee,
N'at Rome, for the harm thurgh Hanybal
That Romayns hath vanquysshed tymes three,
Nas herd swich tendre wepyng for pitee
As in the chambre was for hire departynge; (288-93)

Nought trow I the triumphe of Julius,
Of which that Lucan maketh swich a boost,
Was roialler ne moore curius
Than was th'assemblee of this blisful hoost. (400-3)

Although admittedly exaggerated, such comparisons lend an air of ominous foreshadowing and dramatic irony to prepare the reader for the treachery awaiting the innocent victim. Exactly the same device is used to narrate the famous pursuit of the fox in the Nun's Priest's Tale. In the latter case, the effect is one of unalloyed humor; in the Man of Law's Tale, it seems melodramatic.

Three conventional phrases contribute effectively to their respective contexts. Custance, like Griselda, is described in her innocence: "as the lomb toward his deeth is brought," and the phrase operates in the same way as in the Clerk's Tale. The messenger's letters are stolen, the narrator says, "whil he sleep as a swyn" (745), and the

subsequent apostrophe to him includes the accusation, "thou janglest as a jay" (774).

The one really distinctive simile occurs in the account of Custance's accusation of murder by the wicked knight before Alla.

Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face
 Among a press, of hym that hath be lad
 Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,
 And swich a colour in his face hath had,
 Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad,
 Amonges alle the faces in that route?
 So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute. (645-51)

As already noted,⁵¹ this is the passage selected by W. P. Ker to demonstrate Chaucer's indebtedness to Dante in regard to the use of simile.

There is nothing that exactly corresponds to this in Dante, but the character of Dante is stamped upon it; it has the quality of Dante's imagination, as shown whenever he has to translate his emotional meaning into a pictorial image, and chooses to do so without going very far from his subject. This comparison in Chaucer of the anguish of Constance to the anguish of a man led to execution, whose face is dignified and made remarkable among the indistinct faces of the crowd is not a simile from alien matter, like those in which an army is compared to cranes or to flies; it is a repetition of the same kind of situation, a case of another person under the same sort of distress.⁵²

By its very nature hagiography seems to have little use for simile. The characters tend to be typical, paragons

51 Supra, p. 33.

52 Essays on Medieval Literature, New York, Macmillan, 1905, p. 34-5.

of one or more virtues; their depiction is conceptual more often than visual. Occasionally passages of apostrophe directed against the antagonists employ comparisons of heightened emotion. But the narration of events, by far the greater part of this type of story, proceeds in simple, factual language and rarely stops even for short comparisons.

4. Sermons.

In view of the use of simile noted in the homiletic tradition, the few examples of sermon literature among the Canterbury Tales might be expected to contain a number of similes. Indeed the Parson's Tale employs about fifty, all fully expressed, and often, in the manner of medieval preaching, amplified by numerous applications. Homiletic simile is so well known that it would require disproportionate space to quote the examples in full; the following merely sample the types of comparisons invoked in the Parson's Tale: sin likened to a sword cutting man off from God (355-6); penitence likened to a tree--with each term subdivided analogically (111-120); the sinner taking delight in remembrance of his sins likened to the hound returning to its vomit (134-37); effects of venial sin upon a good man likened to the effect of a drop of water falling into a furnace (383); smoldering anger likened to fire buried under ashes (548); a chiding wife likened to a leaking roof (631-2); idleness

likened to a place without walls open to all attacks (714); and mortification as a means to cure lechery likened to the withdrawing of a pot from the fire to stop its boiling (952).

Unlike the Parson, the Pardoner uses the techniques of the mountebank to win his audience. He employs narrative more effectively than sententious exposition, although he is outspoken in denouncing the vice of which he preaches. But the exemplum is obviously the center of interest to speaker and addressee alike, and in telling this perfectly structured narrative, the Pardoner uses almost no simile. Only two comparisons, quite literal ones, occur in the tale itself. The old man knocking for admittance to the earth walks "like a resteless kaityf" (728) and the poison sold to the youngest of the protagonists is guaranteed to kill "in lasse while/ Than thou wold goon a paas nat but a mile" (865-6).

In his own voice the Pardoner uses two brief comparisons, the first of which is strikingly picturesque. In an apostrophe to the "dronke man," he says:

Thou fallest as it were a styked swyn; (556)

The word styked is cited by the New English Dictionary as occurring in Political Songs (Camden), dated somewhere in the fourteenth century:

Hue leyzen y the stretes y-styked ase swyn.

The phrase was probably used colloquially in Chaucer's day, but the comparison of the drunken man, staggering as "a

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styked swyn" has been rendered immortal by Chaucer. The second of the Pardoner's comparisons merely invokes terms traditionally connected with absolution as a new birth. Those who venerate his relics will be, he promises, "as clene and eek as cleer/ As ye were born." (914-5)

In every way, even in the use of simile, the Pardoner fails to live up to what is expected of an ecclesiastic. His speech attracts by surface appeal similar to that of modern advertising techniques; he lacks the depth of the serious moralist who takes the time to relate phenomena of the natural world with the supernatural truths he has meditated.

More similar in tone to the Parson's Tale than the Pardoner's is the Tale of Melibee. Despite the sententious tone which prevails, only about ten similes are actually found in this work, and these are woven unobtrusively into the long debates upon justice and prudence which form the core of this tale. The comparisons found are similar to those of the Parson; like his they are derived from Holy Scripture and from commentaries by the Fathers of the Church, as, for example:

Salomon weith that right as motthes in the shepes
flees annoyeth to the clothes, and the smale wormes
to the tree, right so anoyeth sorwe to the herte. (996)

For Jhesus Syrak seith that "musik in wepyng is a
noyous thyng"; this is to seyn: as much availeth to
speken bifore folk to which his speche anoyeth, as
it is to syng biforn hym that wepeth. (1045)

He [Solomon] seith also, "Ther may no thyng be likned to the trewe freend; for certes gold ne silver ben nat so muche worth as the goode wyl of a trewe freend." (1158-9)

The other examples are similar in tone and, like these, generally name the authority quoted. None of the similes seem to have been original with Chaucer; indeed the work is largely a translation of the French Livre de Melibée et de Dame Prudence, which is a paraphrase of a work by Albertanus of Brescia.⁵³

5. Romances and Parodies.

Although the courtly romance discussed among Chaucer's earlier works, the Knight's Tale, includes a number of similes, some of which are derived from Boccaccio, the other tales of romance, which partake of the nature of folk tale, employ very few.

The Manciple's Tale, classified by Payne as a "Fable," uses only five phrases of comparison and these are of the most trite variety. The first, based on Ovid's comparison, is also found in Gower's version of the same story.

Whit was this crowe as is a snow-whit swan. (133)
In two different ways the singing of the crow is likened to that of a nightingale:

⁵³ Robinson, p. 740.

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Therwith in al this world no nyghtyngale
 Ne koude, by an hondred thousand deel
 Syngen so wonder myrily and well. (136-8)

Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtyngale; (294)

Only after the narrative is finished and the Manciple has assumed the role of moralist do two other comparisons appear

My sone, keep wel thy tonge, and keep thy freend,
 A wikked tonge is worse than a feend; (319-20)

Wostow wherof a rakel tonge serveth?
 Right as a swerd forkutteth and forkerveth
 An arm a-two, my deere sonne, right so
 A tonge kutteth freendshipe al a-two. (339-42)

As noted in connection with the Saints' Legends, the comparisons seem to be used most often with presentation of character and with moralization.

The Squire's Tale contains a few more examples of comparison than does the Manciple's Tale. The first three examples are literal analogues:

Yong, fressh, and strong, in armes desirous
 As any bachelor of al his hous. (23-4)

It [the horse of brass] stant as it were to the
 ground yglewed. (182)

Right as it were a steede of Lumbardye:
 As it a gentil Poilleys courser were
 Like the Pegasee . . . (192)

The last line adds a touch of the figurative. The description of the king,

Sooth of his word, benigne, and honorable;
 Of his corage as any centre stable: (21-2)

may be taken as figurative in that moral stability is likened to physical. The conventional phrases of comparison

number seven: "shoon as sonne brighte" (170); "stille as any stoon" (171); "murmureden as dooth a swarm of been" (204); "rody and bright as . . . the yonge sonne" (385); "as whit as chalk" (409); "deed and lyk a stoon," (474); and "softe as silk" (613). One line, "That other weep as she to water wolde" has the same Ovidian ring as the similar line pertaining to Pandarus in grief. The false tercelet is compared in his treachery to Paris, to Jason, and to Lameth, and judged worse than all of them (545-557). A proverbial simile is used to explain why the falcon makes her moan to Canace:

And for to maken othere be war by me,
As by the whelp chasted is the leon,
Right for that cause and that conclusion,
Whil that I have a leyser and a space,
My harm I wol confessen er I pace. (490-4)

Likewise proverbial is the passage containing two similes-- the false tercelet is like a "snake in the grass" and like a tomb.

Right as a serpent hit hym under floures
Til he may seen his tyme for to byte,
Right so this god of loves ypocryte
Dooth so his cerymonyes and obeisaunces,
And kepeth in semblaunt alle his observaunces
That sownen into gentillesse of love,
As in a tombe is al the faire above,
And under is the corps, swich as ye woot,
Swich was this ypocrite, bothe coold and hoot. (512-20)

The last simile offers a good example of Chaucer's ability to interrelate the world of bird protagonists with the human world, as Bennett has pointed out.

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Men loven of propre kynde newefangelnesse,
 As briddes doon that men in cages fede,
 For though thou nyght and day take of hem hede,
 And strawe hir cage faire and softe as silk
 And yeve hem sugre, hony, breed and milk,
 Yet right anon as that his dore is uppe,
 He with his feet wol spurne adoun his cuppe,
 And to the wode he wole, and wormes ete; (610-17)

Here one is apt to forget that the traitor being berated is actually a bird!

After the array of similes noted in the Wife of Bath's Prologue, it is somewhat surprising to find so few in her folk tale. Of the six comparisons which appear, four are merely conventional phrases: "as thikke as motes in the sonne-beem" (868); "alone as he was born" (885); "stille . . . as a best" (1034); "hidde hym as an Owle" (1081). For the simile describing the action of Midas' wife overcome by the tension of keeping her secret,

And as a bitore bombleth in the myre,
 She leyde hir mouth unto the water doun; (972-4),

Thomas Harrison suggests that Chaucer may have known the explanation in Bartholemew Anglicus' De proprietatibus rerum "that the bittern puts its bill into the mud to produce its strange note."⁵⁴ In a footnote Harrison adds, "It took centuries to disprove this notion."

Only one fully developed simile is used, and this occurs in the sermon of the aged wife to her dismayed husband on their wedding night:

⁵⁴ They Tell of Birds: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Drayton, Austin, University of Texas, 1956, p. 49.

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Taak fyr, and ber it in the derkeste hous
 Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous,
 And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;
 Yet wole the fyr as faire lye and brenne
 As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde;
 His office natureel ay wol it holde,
 Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.

Heere may ye se wel how that genterye
 Is nat annexed to possessioun,
 Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun
 Alwey, as dooth the fyr, lo in his kynde. (1139-49)

This simile per negationem has literary predecessors in Boethius, Macrobius, and Servius, as pointed out in Robinson's notes. Its use in context reënforces the impression that the most fully developed passages of simile in Chaucer's tales often occur in speeches of moralization.

Although it is fairly well established by now that the Franklin, despite his protestations to the contrary, does employ the "colors of rhetoric" in telling his "Breton lay," he does not often resort to simile. Three comparisons refer to mythological characters after the fashion of the Roman de la Rose:

And dye he /Aurelius/ moste, he seyde, as dide Ekko
 For Narcisus, that dorste nat telle hir wo. (951-2)

Of this matere he dorste no word seyn.
 Under his brest he baar it moore secree
 Than evere did Pamphilus for Galathee. (1108-10)

I wol be trewe unto Averagus,
 Or rather sleen myself in some manere,
 As dide Demociones doghter deere
 By cause that she wolde nat defouled be. (1424-7)

The last example mentions only one of a series of parallel situations cited, but the others are not phrased as

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comparisons. The squire in the tale, like the one on pilgrimage, is "fressher . . . and jolyer of array . . . than is the month of May" (927-8). Because of his hidden sorrow he "langwissheth as a furye dooth in helle" (950). But Dorigen loves her husband "as hire hertes lyf" (816), and he, even after her rash adventure, "cherisseth hire as though she were a queene" (1554). A wintry atmosphere mirrors the squire's state of mind as he invokes assistance from the clerk.

Phebus wax old, and hewed lyk laton,
That in his hoote declynacion
Shoon as the burned gold with stremes brighte. (1245-7)

The dull color of copper mixed with zinc contrasts sharply with the "burned gold"--the expression which Curry finds unique in Chaucer.⁵⁵ The clerk, at the end of the story, remits the debt of the "gentil" squire

As thou right now were copen out of ground,
Ne nevere er now ne haddest knowen me. (1614-5)

Skeat calls this "an idiomatic allusion to the creeping of an insect out of the earth for the first time."⁵⁶

More explicitly recognizable as simile are the three examples which follow:

Love is a thyng as any spirit free,
Wommen, of kynde, desireth libertee,
And nat to been constreyned as a thral; (767-9)

⁵⁵ Op. Cit., p. 7.

⁵⁶ Skeat, V, 400.

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The phrasing is similar to that of the Roman (13959 f.):

Women are freeborn; they've restricted been
By law, that takes away the liberty
That Nature gave them . . . 57

but the tone of the context is quite different.

The second example has overtones of Boccaccio and Ovid, but Chaucer has expressed the simile in his own way:

By proces, as ye knowen everichoon,
Men may so longe graven in a stoon
Til some figure therinne emprented be.
So longe han they confortid hire, til she
Receyved hath, by hope and by resoun,
The emprentyng of hire consolacioun,
Thurgh which hir grete sorwe gan aswage;
She may nat alwey duren in swich rage. (829-36)

Not only does this passage impart information, but also, by its deliberately slow pacing, it contributes to the sense of the passage of time at this point in the narrative.

The last example is merely implied, but the sense of simile is strong.

His brest was hool, withoute for to sene,
But in his herte ay was the arwe kene.
And wel ye knowe that of a sursanure
In surgerye is perilous the cure,
But men myghte touche the arwe, or come therby. (1111-5)

This matter-of-fact translation of the wound of love into medical terminology presents the patient as being in a critical condition more forcefully than if extravagant hyperbole were used.

57 Tr. Harry Robbins, p. 289.

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In the romances, as in the saints' legends, Chaucer retains the custom of using conventional comparisons when they are needed to delineate character, make moralization more attractive, or call attention to events visually or emotionally significant. However, their infrequent appearance leads to the conclusion that simile is of relatively little value to the romantic tales in which the narrative element predominates.

In the type of romance parodied by Sir Thopas, however, the use of petrified tags of comparison was a trademark. The following description of a fair lady rescued by the hero in Libeaus Desconus may probably be considered typical:

As rose her rode was red;
 þe her schon on hir heed,
 As gold wire schineþ briȝt,
 Her browes as selke brede,
 Y-bent in lengþe and brede;
 Her nose was streiȝt and riȝt,
 Her iyen gray as glas;
 Milk whit was her face,
 So seide, þat siȝ þat siȝt;
 Her swere long and small;
 Her beaute tellen all
 No man wip mouþe ne miȝt.⁵⁸

Beside such a passage, Sir Thopas' description hardly seems exaggerated:

Sire Thopas wax a doghty swayn;
 Whit was his face as payndemayn,
 His lippes rede as rose;
 His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,
 And I yow telle in good certayn,
 He hadde a semely nose. (724-9)

58 Ed. Max Kaluza, Leipzig, 1890, p. 53.

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His heer, his berd was lyk saffroun (730)

But he was chaast and no lechour,
And sweete as is the brembul flour (745-6)

Sire Thopas fil in love-longynge,
Al whan he herde the thrustel syngre,
And pryked as he were wood.
His faire steede in his prikyngre
So swatte that men myghte him wryngre;
His sydes were al blood. (772-7)

Besides these clusters of comparisons describing the appearance and emotional make-up of the hero, only three other such phrases are scattered throughout the rest of the work: the narrator refers to the story as "Murier than the nightyn-gale" (834); Sir Thopas' armor is "as whit as is a lilye flour" (867); and "His brydel as the sonne shoon,/ Or as the moone light" (879-80). The first of these three may be, as Skeat has suggested, a direct imitation of the opening lines of Sir Bevis of Hampton:

Lordynges, lysteneth, grete and smale,
Meryar then the nyghtyngale
I wylle yow syngre.⁵⁹

In his edition of Libeaus Desconus, Max Kaluza has brought together all the examples of comparison in the work, about fifty in all. Chaucer's parody, while imitating the tone of such passages with their routine way of presenting character, has not exaggerated the frequency of occurrence. His achievement in the Tale of Sir Thopas is well assessed by Anna Hunt Billings:

59 Skeat, V, 193.

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In the Tale of Sir Thopas, Chaucer parodies the vulgarized romance of his day. He shows up its hollowness and inconsistency, 'but still more in general the childish repetition of formal expressions, the passion for outward description, the wretched composition and tattered stanzas of the street-rhapsodies, into which the courtly romance style of two hundred years ago had by this time degenerated.' (Brandl, p. 680) The longer verse-romances of the later period, which were probably read rather than sung or recited, were for the most part eminently uninspired.

In marvelous contrast to the body of English medieval romance produced after 1350 are the romantic poems of Chaucer. These poems, although they make use of old materials, although they have their mediaeval features and tones, cannot be regarded as a late, brilliant flowering of mediaeval romance; they bear the impress of the Renaissance . . .⁶⁰

The type of parody found in the Nun's Priest's Tale is more complex, but insofar as it makes use of comparison, it imitates certain features of the typical courtly romance. According to Speirs,

The splendid comparisons (and colours) lavished inordinately upon a cock produce a burlesque in which the gorgeous creature is seen as a proud--perhaps vain-glorious--prince of a romance or 'tragedy'; particularly, the glorification of his crowing draws attention at once to that gift of which he is especially vain and which is to be the agency of his fall.⁶¹

Much of the initial picture of the chief character is achieved by means of a cluster of comparisons at the outset:

His voys was murier than the murie orgon
On messe-dayes that in the chirche gon.
Wel sikerer was his crowyng in his logge
Than is a clokke or an abbey orlogge. (2851-4)

⁶⁰ A Guide to the Middle English Romances Dealing with English and Germanic Legends, and with the Cycles of Charlemagne and of Arthur, Yale Studies in English, No. 9, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1901, p. xxii.

⁶¹ Op. Cit., p. 186.

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His coomb was redder than the fyn coral,
 And batailled as it were a castel wal;
 His byle was blak, and as the jeet it shoon;
 Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
 His nayles whitter than the lylve flour,
 And lyk the burned gold was his colour. (2859-2864)⁶²

The picturesque imagery continues when Chaunticleer's attitude of defiance towards Pertelote's homely advice is depicted:

He looketh as it were a grym leoun, (3179)

Thus roial, as a prince is in his halle, (3184)

As proud harbinger of the morning, unaware that the fox lurks nearby, Chaunticleer

Soong murier than the mermyde in the see; (3210)

but when he realizes his danger, he

. . . cride anon, "Cok! cok!" and up he sterte
 As man that was affrayed in his herte. (3277-8)

Two expressions of flattery serve to reassure Chaunticleer that the fox takes pleasure in his singing:

For trewely, ye have as myrie a stevene
 As any aungel hath that is in hevene.
 Therwith ye han in musyk moore feelynge
 Than hadde Boece, or any that kan syng. (3291-4)

The fox too has been introduced in terms of human nature:

Waitynge his tyme on Chauntecleer to falle,
 As gladly doon thise homycides alle
 That in await ligen to mordre men. (3225)

62 In reply to the theory that the cock's colors represent the arms of Bolingbroke, see Lelia P. Bonne's article, Modern Language Notes, Vol. 64 (1949), 78-81, identifying the chief characters as belonging to the "Golden Spangled Hamburg" breed, probably known in England during Chaucer's time.

And in a passage of apostrophe, the fox is likened implicitly to Judas Isacriot, Ganelon, and Sinon.

Parody of epic grandeur marks the passage in which the hue and cry are raised for the captured Chauncleer. The lamentation is greater than that of the Trojans who witnessed the death of Priam at Pirrus' hand, of the wife of Hasdrubal when her husband lost his life during the Roman siege of Carthage, or of the wives of the senators who lost their lives under Nero (3355 f.). In a more colloquial vein, the narrator says that those in pursuit "yolleden as feendes doon in helle" (3389), and that "It semed as that hevne sholde falle" (3401). But one comparison must have been particularly significant to Chaucer's contemporaries:

Certes, he Jakke Straw and his meynne
 Ne nevere shoutes half so shrille
 Whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille,
 As thilke day was maad upon the fox. (3394-7)

In the Nun's Priest's Tale, the figure of comparison seems to have three chief functions. The hero is introduced in conventionally descriptive phrases; the hero and the villain are compared to superlative examples taken from human life; the significance of events is assessed by comparison with earth-shaking events in mythology, history, or contemporary politics.

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6. Fabliaux.

In Chaucer's humorous tales, simile and comparison continue to serve as vehicles of character delineation while assuming, in some instances, increased importance in presenting the narrative itself. Although the number of examples varies from tale to tale, the phrases of comparison are largely responsible for sustaining the consistency of tone which accounts to such an extent for the unity of these finely-wrought fabliaux.

The fragment of a tale told by the Cook begins with a familiar pattern. The chief character is introduced in a passage which includes a cluster of comparisons; when the narrative gets under way, such phrases no longer appear. Those which describe the apprentice occur within the first nine lines of the fragment:

Gaillard he was as goldfynch in the shawe,
 Brown as a berye, a propre short felawe,

 He was as ful of love and paramour
 As is the hyve ful of hony sweete; (4367-8; 4372-3)

Speirs has commented upon Chaucer's ability to delineate character so incisively and economically:

The cook's fragment is only the beginning of a tale. Yet in these few lines we are presented with another vivid character, Perkin Revelour, a London apprentice. Perkin Revelour has his originals in the allegorical tradition of the vernacular sermons and in direct observation of life (Chaucer has doubtless observed the London apprentices). But this particular Perkin

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Revelour lives in the livingness of images which again come directly from the life and speech of the English village communities.⁶³

The comparisons in the Shipman's Tale, although not numerous, are scattered throughout the work. After an initial proverbial comparison likening the fleeting nature of social prestige to a shadow passing upon a wall, all the images are taken from nature, mostly from the avian world. The joy of the merchant when claimed as a cousin by the young monk is expressed in a conventional way, "But was as glad therof as fowel of day" (38). A similar passage describing the welcome given the monk at his home uses approximately the same cliché: "For which they were as glad of his comyng/ As fowel is fayn whan that the sonne up riseth"(50-1). One rather original simile sheds light upon the character of the monk without giving any explicit description of him. When the wife, whom he addresses as "Nece," accosts him in the garden one morning, he explains his early rising by comparing his habits to those of married men:

"Nece," quod he, "it oghte ynough suffise
Fyve houres for to slepe upon a nyght,
But it were for an old appalled wight
As been this wedded men, that lye and dare
As in a fourme sit a wery hare,
Were al forstraught with houndes grete and smale.(100-5)

With this opening he invites her confidence, and when she hesitates to criticize the monk's "cousin," her husband, he replies:

63 Speirs, Op. Cit., p. 133.

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He is na moore cosyn unto me
Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree! (149-50)

After a short conversation they plan a clandestine meeting, "And forth she gooth as jolif as a pye" (209). Subsequently, when the merchant succeeds in his business venture, almost the same thing is said of him, "And hoom he gooth, murie as a papejay" (369). But in this work described in terms of singing birds and hares, the irony gives meaning to the tale; there is no need for passages of moralization and no need for sententious similes.

Only five comparisons are used by the Friar in telling his tale: The most commonplace describes the carter who "cried as he were wood"--a phrase which picks up thematically the description of the Summoner in the Prologue. The actual characterization of the summoner in the tale is in language one might expect of a friar:

And right as Judas hadde purses smale,
And was theef, right swich a theef was he; (1350-1)

The other comparison of this character uses bird imagery:

This somonour, which that was as ful of jangles,
As ful of venym been these waryangles, (1407-8)

Skeat explains the meaning of these lines in this way:

The epithet "little felon" or "little murderer" agrees with other names for the shrike, viz. "butcher-bird," "murdering bird," . . . so called because it impales beetles and small birds on thorns, for the purpose of pulling them to pieces. This is why I take venim to mean "spite" rather than "poison" in this passage.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Skeat, V, 325.

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In any case, the simile seems appropriate to the character in the Friar's Tale.

The two other similes in this tale employ the imagery of hunting:

The summoner Hadde alwey bawdes redy to his hond,
As any hawk to lure in Engelond (1339-40)

For in this world nys dogge for the bowe
That kan an hurt deer from an hool yknowe
Bet than this somnour knew a sly lecchour,
Or an avowtier, or paramour. (1369-72)

Although this vocabulary might seem more appropriate for the Monk than the Friar, the connotations attached to hawk and blood-hound seem perfectly chosen for the character being portrayed.

In a manner similar to that of the Friar, the Summoner uses a few well chosen similes and comparisons during the course of his narrative. The manner in which the friar of the story greets the wife,

And kiste hire sweete, and chirketh as a sparwe
With his lyppes . . . (1804-5)

immediately calls to mind the narrator's phrase about the Summoner himself, "lecherous as a sparrow," although Professor Manly holds that the kiss was a usual mode of salutation⁶⁵

The wife's account of the husband's faults is picturesque: "He is as angry as a pissemyre," (1825); "He

65 Robinson, p. 707.

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groneth lyk our boor, lith in oure sty" (1829). The first comparison may well have been Chaucer's invention, for the New English Dictionary lists this line as the first use of the word pissemyre discovered in literature.

In his lecture to Thomas, the Friar rails against gluttons:

Me thynketh they been lyk Jovinyan,
Fat as a whale, and walkynge as a swan,
As vinolent as botel in the spence. (1930-2)

Of this passage Harrison remarks:

Chaucer combined learning with observation. In St. Jerome, as Skeat notes, he may have remembered the description of Jovinian as "formosus, crassus, nitidus, dealbatus, et quasi sponsus semper incedens." But transforming these adjectives . . . the poet presents a picture, immediate and graphic because familiar. Here observation derives from actual experience and hence instantly suggest two physical characteristics.⁶⁶

The Friar assures Thomas that prayers of "charitable and chaste bisy freres" ascend "right as an hawk up at a sours/ Up springeth into th'eir" (1938-40). As in the case of the hawk image in the Friar's Tale, the ironic value of the connotation is unmistakable. The Friar's plea to Thomas not to anger his wife is couched in conventional simile:

Ther nys, ywys, no serpent so cruel,
Whan man tret on his tayl, ne half so fel
As womman is, whan she hath caught an ire; (2001-3)

⁶⁶ Op. Cit., p. 44-5.

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Ironically, all the sermonizing about wrath turns directly upon the friar after Thomas insults him, especially since the last comparison in his impromptu sermon has promised:

Thou shalt me fynde as just as is a squyre. (2090)

But once angered, the friar "up stirte as dooth a wood leoun" (2152) and "looked as it were a wilde boor" (2160). The "boor" simile has shifted automatically with the turning of the tables from Thomas to the friar. The friend to whom the insulted friar goes for consolation observes:

I se wel that som thyng ther is amys;
Ye looken as the wode were ful of thevys (2172-3)

The final part of the tale uses two comparisons which are of no particular significance. Instead of sympathy, the confidant rather expresses wonder at the ingenuity of Thomas,

The lord sat stille as he were in a traunce" (2216), and having pondered in a scientific manner how the "gift" might be divided equally, he gives audience to the squire who volunteers a solution which would involve, of course, a repetition of the insult, this time with the "cherl, with body stif and toght/ As anytabour" (2267-8).

The few comparisons in the Reeve's Tale, although commonplace, are especially effective. The presentation of characters involves several conventional phrases:

A millere was ther dwellynge many a day,
As any pecok he was proud and gay. (3925)

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But less usual is the description:

As piled as an ape was his skulle. (3935)

As Robinson points out in his notes, the word piled can mean either "deprived of hair, bald" or "covered with pile or hair." In either case the miller is not supposed to be particularly handsome. Two phrases describe the pride of his wife:

And she was proud, and peert as is a pye. (3950)

She was as digne as water in a dich. (3964)

The latter expression is not original with Chaucer. Skeat points to it as proverbial and cites a passage in the Flowman's Crede where the Dominican friars are thus described:

Ther is more pryve pride in Prechours hertes
 Than ther lefte [remained] in Lucyfer, er he were
 fallen;
 They ben digne as dich-water, that dogges in
 beyteth [feed in] (375 f.)⁶⁷

The traditional comparison "greye as glas" applied to the miller's daughter is surprising, for she is otherwise not described in terms of conventional beauty.

More effective are the similes which occur in the course of the narrative. After the miller has sent the two scholars on a wild chase to recover their horse, John returns "Wery and weet, as beest is in the reyn" (4107). Upon retiring, the wife "As any jay . . . light was and jolyf" (4154), but before long the miller, having drunk freely of the ale,

67 Skeat, V, 119.

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"as an hors . . . snorteth in his sleep" (4163). Later, when John sees Aleyn successful in his capture of the miller's daughter, he reproaches himself, "And I lye as a draf-sak in my bed" (4206). Finally when by mistake Aleyn and the miller grapple, "They walwe as doon two pigges in a poke" (4278).⁶⁸ Such imagery could not be improved upon in setting the tone for this tale.

From the viewpoint of technique, the Merchant's Tale is admittedly a masterpiece. A number of similes contribute effectively to the characterization and plot of this ironic story.

The Merchant's initial discussion of marriage contains only proverbial similes. Bachelors, he says, "lyve but as a bryd or as a beest,/ In libertee, and under noon areest (1280-1)--as he knows from long personal experience and perhaps also from Deschamps' Miroir de Mariage (528-33). All other joys besides that of marriage "passen as a shadwe upon a wal." This truism, ultimately derived from Proverbs 19:14, appears several times in the tales. Husbands are to love their wives "as Christ loved his chirche" (1384--cf. Eph.5:25).

⁶⁸ Wyclif uses a similar expression in one of his sermons: "þan shulde pees be in þe chirche wipouten strif of dogges in a poke." Selected Works, II, 358. But the more alliterative phrase, "pigges in a poke," has not been credited to any source earlier than Chaucer in the New English Dictionary.

But the more functional similes are those spoken by or about January in the course of the narrative. He is the only character who is extensively developed. His intention of taking a young wife is premeditated:

But certeynly, a yong thyng may men gye,
Right as men may warm wax with handes plye. (1429-30)

Germaine Dempster cites as somewhat parallel a passage of the Miroir concerning the ideal wife:

Et douce comme columbelle,
Obeissant a moy en tout, (730-1)

"But," adds Miss Dempster,

I have not found anywhere a mention of wax which could have suggested either the comparison in the lines quoted above or the second appearance of warm wax in the tale, when it is used by May herself for counterfeiting the key in order to admit her lover into the garden.⁶⁹

Although not exactly in the same context, the idea of molding a character like wax seems to have been traditional, for it appears in the writings of Horace and of St. Basil.

A beardless youth, his tutor gone at last,
Loves horses, hounds, the sunny Campus grass;
Pliant as wax to crime, to counsellors harsh,
Slow to provide for his best interests,
Extravagant, high-minded, amorous,
And quick to change the object of his love.⁷⁰
(Ars Poetica, 194-9)

⁶⁹ Dramatic Irony in Chaucer, New York, The Humanities Press, 1959, p. 51.

⁷⁰ Tr. John G. Hawthorne in Latin Poetry in Verse Translation, Ed. L. R. Lind, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957, p. 133.

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While the mind is still easy to mold and as pliable as wax, taking the form of what is impressed upon it, it should be exercised from the very beginning in every good discipline.⁷¹

Even a commonplace phrase like that of January saying that husband and wife should be mutually helpful "as a suster shal the brother" may suggest ironically that this relationship is all his wife will wish to have with him.

One especially forceful simile, expressed in passionate apostrophe, is used to characterize Damyan, not so much as a person but as a function in the story:

O perilous fyr, that in the bedstraw bredeth!
 O famulier foo, that his servyce bedeth!
 O servant traytour, false hoomly hewe,
 Lyk to the naddre in bosom sly untrewe,
 God shild us alle from youre aqueyntaunce! (1783-7)

The first line implies a comparison even more effective than the simile of the serpent in hiding because of the connotative values of the words fyr and bedstraw.

The other phrases describing Damyan, the beauty of May, and the festivities at the wedding are commonplace. But the characterization of January himself is largely accomplished by a series of well chosen similes. His self-portrait is pathetic as well as ironic:

⁷¹ Ascetical Works, tr. Sister M. Monica Wagner, C. S. C., New York, Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1950, p.267.

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Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
 That blometh er that fruyt ywaxen bee;
 And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed,
 I feele me nowhere hoor but on my heed;
 Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene
 As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene. (1461-6)

Living under this kind of delusion, he makes love in imagery borrowed from the Canticle of Canticles:

Com forth now, with thyne eyen columbyn!
 How fairer been thy brests than is wyn! (2141-2)

But the dove in this story is no more innocent and guileless than is the Pardoner who uses the same bird for comperison.

Self-deceived, as well as deceived by May, January still protests in the garden:

Levere ich hadde to dyen on a knyf,
 Than thee offende, trewe deere wyf. (2163-4)

And perfectly sure of himself he "Syngeth ful murier than the papejay" (2322).

In sharp contrast to this self-image, the narrator presents a more objective picture of January as he appears on his wedding night.

He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte;
 With thikke brustles of his berd unsofte,
 Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere--

 He was al coltissch, ful of ragerye
 And ful of jargon as a flekked pye (1823-5; 1847-8)

The similes are not original, but, as Curry points out, the coarse bristly hair was traditionally associated with ugly giants, as in the following examples:

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Hys hed is row with feltred here,
Blake brysteld as a bore. (Ipomedon, 6147-8)⁷²

His berde like bristullis of a swyne.
(Sir Bevis of Hamtoun, 2509)⁷³

Harske as a hunde-fisch (Morte Arthure, 1084)⁷⁴

Speirs has summarized the total effect of this memorable passage:

The realism of the visualization of Januarie as an old man in a nightcap--Elde individualized--has in itself the peasant vigour of the fabliau tales and the Wife of Bath. . . . The impression is of some aged gnarled wreck of a tree which surprisingly puts forth young shoots in a last spasm of life.⁷⁵

The similes of the Merchant's Tale operate on two levels. By images associated with traditional romance and even with the poetry of Solomon, they help portray the world in which the senile, ostrich-like January imaginatively lives. By comparisons commonly associated with the most repulsive characters, the protagonist is seen through the eyes of May and the more objective viewpoint of the narrator. The complex weaving of the appearance-reality theme which constitutes ^{the} core of this tale uses simile as an essential element.

72 Curry, Op. Cit., p. 23.

73 Ibid., p. 39.

74 Ibid., p. 87.

75 Op. Cit., p. 162.

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The Miller's Tale, perhaps the most skilfully wrought of Chaucer's fabliaux, effects a perfect fusion of plot and characterization. This is largely achieved through the use of simile.

Alisoun is one of Chaucer's most vivid characters. Her portrayal, as Muscatine has pointed out, is effected largely by traditional rhetorical techniques:

The form is still rhetorical effictio and still preserves the convention of the inventory, disarrayed indeed, but listing at every turn the categories of the archetype; the fairness, the eye, the bent brows, the hue, the voice, the mouth, the carriage, the silken costume, the jewelry, the accomplishments. And each category is filled by a superlative. The similes are the similes that apply in the Oxford context, just as Absalon's gifts of spiced ale and piping hot waffles apply.⁷⁶

Speirs suggests that the means Chaucer uses to vivify a traditional plot and to make his characters "vividly there" are of the same kind as those employed in the Prologue.

But Alisoun is so aboundingly alive because the similes themselves are so much more alive. Chaucer is now drawing upon and managing completely freely the creative resources of English speech; and these resources are the source of Alisoun's wonderful vitality, a peasant vitality arising from the (so largely) country imagery in which she is created, though she is a wealthy young bourgeois wife of Oxford town.⁷⁷

76 Op. Cit., p. 229.

77 Op. Cit., p. 127.

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In developing this idea, Speirs demonstrates in detail how the various images contribute to the picture of Alisoun's "wild young life" with "suggestions of fruitfulness and natural growth," portraying a girl "by nature rustic, though decked out in finery," having a "natural wealth of her own," "native strength and uprightness of carriage . . . combined . . . with suppleness of body." The broad brooch, says Speirs, "adds a suggestion of a slightly barbaric element in her aspect" to which is contrasted the "agreeable softness" expressed by the comparison with the "wolle of a wether."⁷⁸

Thus, he concludes of Alisoun:

In these images she is vividly perceptible; but something further is conveyed, the essence, the essential nature of this particular young wife. From the images springs directly the recognition that her potentialities are simply those of nature, of a natural creature, wild, young, untamed.⁷⁹

Paul Beichner goes further in seeing the picture of Alisoun and the other characters not only as vivid portraits, but more integrally as necessary to the plot of this particular tale. He suggests that Chaucer was forced to create a heroine combining the complex traits demanded by her several roles in the story. He presents Absolon as squeamish, beautiful, and effeminate, thus providing reasons for Alisoun's

78 Speirs, Op. Cit., p. 129.

79 Idem.

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rejection of him. But Chaucer's problem, as it appears to Beichner, was to create a beautiful heroine, repulsed by Absolon, yet still capable of the ironic retribution called for by the structure of the tale. He suggests that Chaucer decided he could save her from inconsistency

if he made her a country-bred girl, a little impudent as well as impish and skittish. And so with as much care as enthusiasm, he portrayed her in a series of comparisons boldly drawn from the country-side. She is as graceful and slender as a weasel (and apparently as hard to catch), with apron as white as morning milk, and plucked brows as black as a sloe; she is more pleasant to behold than the new pear tree and softer than the wool of a wether; her song is as loud and lively as that of a swallow sitting on a barn (Absolon quavers like the nightingale); she is as playful as a kid or calf and as skittish as a colt; but her mouth is as sweet as bragot, or mead, or a hoard of apples laid in hay--and so on.⁸⁰

Beichner's conclusion underlines the contribution of simile to the organic unity of the tale:

The intrinsic merit of this portrait has deservedly made the passage a favorite of reader and critic alike, but its brilliance should not blind one to its organic function in the whole--by associating Alisoun with things of the country to render the unseemly manner of her rejection of Absolon plausible. Alisoun and Absolon, the one country-bred and the other citified, are foils for each other.⁸¹

A number of the similes are completely conventional.

Beichner has even demonstrated that the portrait of Absolon

⁸⁰ "Characterization in The Miller's Tale," Chaucer Criticism, The Canterbury Tales, ed. Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, University of Notre Dame Press, 1960, p. 123-4.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 124.

is largely an adaptation of Peter Riga's description of Absolon's prototype, David's son, in the Aurora or Biblia versificata.⁸² But a number of the short comparisons deserve special attention.

One which Beichner finds particularly apropos is part of Alisoun's description:

The simile of the colt in the trave--'at a forge' according to the gloss in MS Harley 7333 of this line--is one of the most brilliant action similes Chaucer ever wrote. From the truncated definition of trave in the glossaries of Chaucer texts many a careless reader might conclude that the poet is speaking of a colt in the shafts of a cart; but with the definition of the N.E.D. in mind--'A frame or enclosure of bars in which a restive horse is placed to be shod'--one can easily picture the leaping and kicking, the twisting and turning of a colt being shod for the first time, and one can imagine the vigor and the futility of Alisoun's resistance to the superior strength of Nicholas. Moreover, the simile is appropriate because Chaucer has already said of Alisoun that

Wynsynge she was, as is a joly colt;
and he will have use for a smith and forge before
the story is over.⁸³

The description of Nicholas, "sweete as is the roote Of lycorys, or any cetewale" (3206-7) seems to have been Chaucer's invention. The use of the "pere-jonette tree" as a comparison for Alisoun seems carefully chosen, in view of the fact that "pere-Ionettes were very sweet and very early

⁸² Beichner, Op. Cit., p. 120-1.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 125-6.

ripe; and therefore very soon rotten."⁸⁴ The comparison "greye as gos" seems to have been Chaucer's invention; at least Curry claims not to have found it elsewhere.⁸⁵

Particularly effective in contribution functionally to the narrative are the similes which appear at the end. The passage in which Absolon makes love to Alisoun, unaware of Nicholas' presence, includes three comparisons, perfectly suited to the speaker:

I moorne as dooth a lamb after the tete.
Ywis, lemman, I have swich love-longynge,
That lik a turtel trewe is my moornynge,
I may nat ete na moore than a mayde. (3704)

But like January, who envisions himself as a great lover, Absolon appears in realistic terms after his humiliation; he "weep as dooth a child that is ybete." (3759)

In general, Chaucer's use of simile in the Canterbury Tales seems to vary from work to work, as well as from genre to genre. Its greatest contribution seems to be seen in the Prologue and in the most original of Chaucer's tales, the fabliaux. In the Saints' Legends and Romances, comparisons are used chiefly to delineate character at the outset and, occasionally, to heighten the emotional tone of a significant passage of narrative. In sermon literature, its function varies with the type of preacher. The Parson relies heavily upon it to convey supernatural truths; the

⁸⁴ Skeat, V, 99. Cf. Piers Plowman, C. xiii, 221.

⁸⁵ Op. Cit., p. 52.

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Pardoner scarcely uses it at all. The Wife of Bath shares the medieval preacher's ability to quote authorities, and in her apologia she uses numerous traditional comparisons. The most effective of Chaucer's similes are the short ones, chosen from the vocabulary appropriate to the characters and settings of English life in town and countryside.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The most characteristic quality in Chaucer's use of simile seems to have been flexibility. Each separate work in its organic unity calls for a unique contribution of this figure; in no two works of Chaucer can the type and frequency of simile and comparison be said to coincide. Yet every conventional type of simile is somewhere represented in Chaucer's poetry: epic simile, Biblical similitude, parallels juxtaposing disparate figures, likenesses drawn from homogeneous references, similes per negationem, comparison with characters or actions representing superlative attributions, proverbial similes, and brief phrases of comparison. Literary precedents have been found for all the types mentioned, and analogues have been cited for almost every example in Chaucer.

The truly epic simile, patterned after examples found in the Iliad and the Odyssey, rarely appears in Chaucer. The early works in the dream vision convention never require such elaboration. During the Italian period, only the Knight's Tale includes situations which demand slowly-paced and grandiose simile; the few examples introduced in this work are derived from the Teseide, and by comparison with Boccaccio's work, the tale of Palamon and Arcite seems almost devoid of simile. Although Boccaccian influence is

still apparent in Troilus and Criseyde, the chief emphasis falls upon psychological aspects of character both in the Italian and in the English version. Except for the scene depicting Troilus as a wounded bull, no sense of epic simile is called for in the work.

Biblical similitude appears sporadically throughout Chaucer's work wherever its use is natural to the setting and characters; hence it figures more prominently than epic simile. The Parson's Tale, a perfectly typical medieval sermon, employs about fifty examples. The Wife of Bath (who can quote Scripture to suit her purposes!) rivals the Parson in her repertoire of homiletic simile. The long arguments found in the Tale of Melibeus include, in about ten instances, the same kind of similitude. Otherwise, it is only occasionally that a character becomes meditative or sententious and quotes Solomon or Boethius, using this figure of speech.

The somewhat shorter simile in which two disparate figures are compared is frequently found in Chaucer, its uses varying with the purposes of the work. The early poetry, based on French models, especially the Roman de la Rose and the Hotets of Machaut, frequently compares an abstraction, such as Fortune, with some tangible phenomenon of nature, or some type of human behavior with instinctual manifestations in the animal world. Bird imagery is often

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used for the latter purpose. Similes occurring in source material, especially in Ovid and Boccaccio, are often transplanted into Chaucer's work; however, these are selected carefully and frequently altered in tone or point of emphasis to suit the new context. Whereas Ovid's normal practice is to pile up three or more analogies to demonstrate a point, Chaucer is more apt to select one, usually one which is in close harmony with the imagery of the work in general. In the Legend of Good Women Chaucer's good taste is made evident by examination of the Ovidian similes he rejected.

More originality is shown by Chaucer in the use of similes involving literal parallels drawn from the familiar world. In making such comparisons Chaucer has followed the example of Dante. Particularly effective examples of similes of this type include the likening of Constance's face to that of a condemned criminal, of Criseyde to the nightingale arrested in its song and then continuing, and of the bewildered Griselda to one awakened from deep sleep. Like Dante, Chaucer's achieves an intensification of meaning and clarification of visual image in such down-to-earth comparisons.

Only two fully developed examples of the simile per negationem have been noted: one in the sermon of the wife on gentillesse, demonstrating the lack of correspondence between human nature and the nature of fire, the other in the Knight's Tale, following a pattern used in the Roman de la

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Rose, showing that wild animals, hunted or deprived of their young, could not surpass the fury of the combatants.

Comparison of a specific person or action with a superlative example in its realm is frequently found in Chaucer's work, as in the French literature which influenced him. Chaucer was merely accepting conventional usage when he described characters with phrases such as "wise as Solomon," "strong as Hercules," "faithful as Penelope." Almost the same effect is achieved when an event is presented as more significant than the burning of Troy, the sack of Rome, etc. This type of comparison is used seriously in the Man of Law's Tale, humorously in the Nun's Priest's Tale.

Proverbial, sententious similes occur throughout Chaucer's work, sometimes casually, sometimes with the obvious intention of revealing the character of the speaker. Thus Pandarus and the Wife of Bath are especially prone to express themselves in such similes; even the more matter-of-fact aspects of Criseyde's character are at times revealed in her tendency to resort to them.

The brief phrases of comparison, which are most often associated with Chaucer's work, best exemplify the paradox of originality within a conventional framework. Almost none of Chaucer's expressions appear to be original, yet in many instances, time-worn phrases contribute to the general impression of freshness. Especially in the fabliaux,

Chaucer has rendered immortal a number of phrases which are pure cliché in the work of his contemporaries. The particular talent he exercised seems to have been the ability to conceive and communicate his characters as living personalities; hence the imagery used to portray them is consistently homogeneous. At times Chaucer wrote stereotyped effictio worthy of Geoffrey of Vinsauf when he presented typical characters, but when plot or dramatic sense required it, he could also create an Alisoun or a Wife of Bath.

In general, the simile seems to figure most prominently in Chaucer's expository, didactic, and lyric passages; it assumes less importance in the narrative portions of the Canterbury Tales. Dramatic apostrophe challenges the speaker to find analogies which are fittingly devastating, and occasions of deep emotion seem to cry out for expression in terms of sublime parallels.

Chaucer could tell a tale in forthright narrative, without embellishment and in rapid tempo, or he could slow his pace to that of a pageant and use the colors of rhetoric as integral elements of his artistic whole. Sensitivity and good taste everywhere govern his use of simile.

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APPENDIX

ABSTRACT OF

Similes in the Works of Chaucer:
Their Origins and Stylistic Functions

In a discussion of the contribution of simile to Chaucer's style, it is necessary to include comparison, because this closely allied figure of speech has generally been classified as simile in connection with Chaucer's work.

Chaucer's literary heritage included numerous genres in which simile played a variety of roles. Homeric epic simile had seldom been used, but Layamon introduced several examples into the Brut. Biblical similitudes, more or less extended, were common in homiletic and didactic literature. Ovidian simile was well known. Scarcely a page of the Roman de la Rose failed to use this figure. Comparisons of the type used by Dante, although at first sight commonplace, proved that the terms of simile need not be chosen from widely disparate areas of reference. Short phrases of comparison, probably as old as language itself, appeared in most forms of literature. Chaucer eventually made use of all these types of simile in his works.

At the outset Chaucer employed mainly conventional similes and comparisons, many of them borrowed directly from the Roman de la Rose and Machaut's Motets.

As he matured, Chaucer showed greater originality in his use of simile. Although he continued to use the type

of simile characteristic of the Roman, he also discovered in the House of Fame the usefulness of Dantean simile. Likewise he began to use clusters of comparisons, a technique which he perfected especially in the later Canterbury Tales. However, in the Monk's Tale he followed the unadorned style of his Biblical and Boccaccian models almost devoid of simile.

Chaucer attempted to use epic simile in the Knight's Tale, but the nature of the work precluded his adoption of many examples found in the Teseide. The Troilus and Criseyde employs numerous similes, many of sententious and proverbial nature; these contribute effectively to characterization. The similes in the Legend of Good Women are almost all found in the Ovidian source material.

In the Canterbury Tales the appearance of simile varies largely with the genre. Saints' legends and miracles use a few stereotyped examples. Sermon literature, exemplified by the Parson's Tale, employs numerous Biblical similitudes. Romances and parodies use clusters of comparisons, generally for characterization, but few examples are found in the narrative sections. The fabliaux use short phrases of comparison to present characters, assist visualization of significant events and sustain consistency of tone.

Chaucer is versatile and flexible in his use of simile. No other writer has built of so many clichés such original monuments of literature.

This thesis submitted in 1964 to the Department of English Literature in the Faculty of Arts, of the University of Ottawa, Canada, in view of obtaining the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, contains two hundred seventy-four pages.