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

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

Example: Iliad 6.146-49
As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity. The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning. So one generation of men will grow while another dies.

Example: Aeneid 6.305-310
Here a whole crowd came streaming to the banks . . . as many souls as leaves that yield their hold on boughs and fall through forests in the early frost of autumn . . .

Example: Paradise Lost 1.301-303
[Lucifer] stood and call’d
His Legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans’t
Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks
In Vallombrosa, where th’ Etrurian shades
High overarch’t imbow’r
Example: Omeros, 14

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

Similes to discuss: Odyssey 12—Scylla

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