

Like a god* vs. *god-like
Making sense of the syntactic variety
of similitive expressions in Homer

Nina de Kreij
St John's College, Oxford

1 Similitive expressions in Homer

1.1 Terminology

(1)	<i>Achilles</i>	<i>fights</i>	<i>like</i>	<i>Ares</i>
	Comparee	Aspect	Marker	Standard of comparison

1.2 Syntactic types of similitive expressions

Marker is particle

(2)	<i>theòs</i>	<i>d'</i>	<i>hòs</i>	<i>tíeto</i>	<i>démōi</i>
	god.NOM.SG	PTCL	like	honour.3SG.IPF.PASS	people.DAT.SG
‘He was honoured like a god by the people.’ (<i>Il.</i> 13.218)					

Marker is verb (participle)

(3)	<i>nūn</i>	<i>dè</i>	<i>theoīsin</i>	<i>éoikas,</i>	<i>hoi</i>	<i>ouranòn</i>
	now	PTCL	gods.DAT.PL	resemble.2SG.PF	who.NOM.PL	heaven.ACC.SG
	<i>eurùn</i>		<i>ékhousi.</i>			
broad.ACC.SG hold.3SG.PRS ‘But now you resemble the gods, who hold broad heaven.’ (<i>Od.</i> 16.200)						

Marker is adjective (adverb)

(4)	<i>autàr</i>	<i>épeit'</i>	<i>autoī</i>	<i>moi</i>	<i>epéssuto</i>	<i>daímoni</i>	<i>īsos.</i>
	PTCL	then	self.DAT.SG	1.DAT.SG	rush.3SG.IPF	god.DAT.SG	equal.NOM.SG
‘But then upon me myself he rushed equal to a god.’ (<i>Il.</i> 5.459)							

Marker is case

(5)	<i>Hermiōnēn,</i>	<i>hè</i>	<i>eīdos</i>	<i>ékhe</i>
	Hermione.ACC.SG	who.NOM.SG	appearance.ACC.SG	have.3SG.IPF
	<i>khrusēs</i>	<i>Aphrodítēs</i>		
	golden.GEN.SG	Aphrodite.GEN.SG		
‘Hermione, who had the appearance of golden Aphrodite .’ (<i>Od.</i> 4.14)				

Marker is unexpressed

(6) *pá̄ntes d' en khrōi p̄ekhthen arēīthó̄n*
 all.NOM.PL PTCL in flesh.DAT.SG fix.3.PL.AOR.PASS Ares-swift.GEN.PL
aizēōn.
 youth.GEN.PL
 'All [my arrows] are fixed in the flesh of youths swift as Ares.' (*Il.* 8.298)

Explicit aspect of comparison

(7) *(̄ē̄t̄oī m̄ē̄n t̄ōd̄ē k̄al̄ōn̄ akoué̄men̄ est̄in̄ aoidōū̄ |̄ toiōū̄d̄',)*
hōios̄ h̄ōd̄' est̄ī theōis̄'
 such.REL.3.NOM.SG DEM.3.NOM.SG be.3SG.PRS god.DAT.PL
enal̄ígkios̄ aud̄ē̄n̄.
 resembling.NOM.SG **voice.ACC.SG**
 '(Indeed this is a good thing to listen to such a singer,) the kind that this man is,
 resembling the gods **with regard to his voice.**' (*Od.* 9.3-4)

Implicit aspect of comparison

(8) *h̄ō d̄' épeita metēúda isótheos̄ ph̄ōs.*
 3.NOM.SG PTCL then speak.among.3SG.IPF god-like.NOM.SG man.NOM.SG
 'But then he spoke among them, the god-like man.' (*Il.* 23.569)

Extended similes

Comparee	Standard	Narrative Context	Reference
Aias	Ares	Aias entering into battle	<i>Il.</i> 7.206-13
Agamemnon	Zeus	Agamemnon unable to sleep	<i>Il.</i> 10.3-10
Meriones & Idomeneus	Ares & Phobos	M. & I. entering into battle	<i>Il.</i> 13.298-305
Nausicaa	Artemis	Nausicaa being noble and brave	<i>Od.</i> 6.101-9

2 The concept of time stability

more time stable		less time stable
nouns	adjectives	verbs
concepts	properties	events/actions
denote		describe

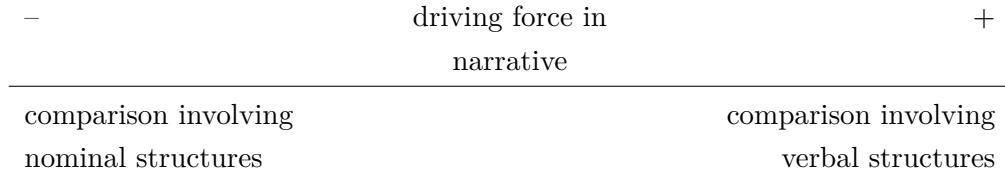
Actions tend to be more temporary than concepts, and thus within a narrative discourse, a higher degree of verability means a lower degree of time stability and greater power to drive the narrative forward.

(9) *A wild horse ran across a field until it came to a river. There it stopped to have a rest and a drink.*

3 Comparisons in narrative context

What role does the comparison play within its context, how does it interact with the unfolding of the narrative? Is it part of what drives the narrative forward?

3.1 The role of word class and time stability



3.2 The narrative environment

There are a number of environments in which comparisons refer to general characteristics or appear as metrically convenient ornaments:

- Lists and genealogies
- Non-restrictive relative clauses
- Epithets
- Formulaic passages: speech introductions, offerings, meals, arrivals/departures, address

(10) *tōn mēn Odusseūs ērkhe Dii*
 3.GEN.PL PTCL Odysseus.NOM.SG be.leader.3SG.IPF Zeus.DAT.SG
mētin atálantos.
 counsel.DAT.PL equal.NOM.SG

‘Of them Odysseus was the leader, equal to Zeus in counsel.’ (*Il.* 2.636)

Comparisons count as driving the narrative forward when the effect of the comparison plays an active role in the story.

(11) *(aīpsa d' hetaīron heòn Patrokłēa proséeipe*
phthegksámenos parà nēós; hò dè klisiēthen akoúsas)

ékmolen *īsos* *Ārēi*, *kakoū* *d'* *ára*
 come.forth.3SG.AOR like.NOM.SG Ares.DAT.SG evil.GEN.SG PTCL PTCL

hoi *pélen* *arkhē*.

3.DAT.SG become.3SG.IPF beginning.NOM.SG

‘(Immediately he [Achilles] spoke to his comrade Patroclus, calling him from beside the ship; and he, hearing from the hut) came forth like Ares, and for him that was the beginning of evil.’ (*Il.* 11.602-4)

4 Distribution of comparison types

4.1 Compounds

Compound type	Interaction with narrative context					
	No			Possibly		
<i>god-like</i>	(26 20)	46	94%	(3 0)	3	6%
<i>like-god</i>	(37 33)	70	90%	(5 3)	8	10%
<i>Ares-swift</i>	(3 0)	3	100%	—	—	0%
<i>theīos</i>	(16 41)	57	97%	(1 1)	2	3%
<i>aréios</i>	(16 3)	19	70%	(8 0)	8	30%

4.2 Other syntactic types

Syntactic type	Interaction with narrative context					
	No		Possibly		Yes	
Particle	(3 3)	6	20%	—	—	0%
Adj/Adv	(32 8)	40	52%	(7 5)	12	16%
Verb	(3 3)	6	46%	—	—	0%
Case	(0 1)	1	100%	—	—	0%
Simile	—	—	0%	—	—	0%

References

Allen, T. W. (1939) *Homeri Ilias*. Oxford.

Coffey, M. (1957) ‘The function of the Homeric Simile’ *AJPh* 78.2: 113-132.

Givón, T. (1984) *Syntax: a functional-typological introduction*. Amsterdam.

Jong, I. d. (2004) *Narrators and focalizers. The presentation of the story in the Iliad*. London.

Larsen K. D. (2007) ‘Simile and comparison in Homer – A definition.’ *C&M* 58: 5-63.

Mühl, P. v. d. (1962) *Homeri Odyssea*. Basel.

Ready, J.L. (2011) *Character, narrator, and simile in the Iliad*. Cambridge.

Vogel, P.M. (1996) *Wortarten und Wortartenwechsel: zur Konversion und verwandten Erscheinungen im Deutschen und in anderen Sprachen*. Berlin.

Wetzer, H. (1996) *The typology of adjectival predication*. Berlin.