

ASPECTS OF VALERIUS FLACCUS' USE OF SIMILES

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The only certain reference to Valerius Flaccus by any of his contemporaries is Quintilian's brief obituary notice of him: *multum in Valerio Flacco nuper amisimus* (*Inst.* 10.1.90). Even today he remains almost unknown and unrecognised. This is unfortunate, since his *Argonautica* can exercise an immediate attraction through its vivid and compressed style. The similes are an important element in that style. Certain striking characteristics of Valerius' similes, notably their brevity, have already been identified by earlier critics. The purpose of this paper is firstly to discuss the characteristics of the similes more fully, *inter alia* by means of comparisons with other epic writers; and secondly to suggest that the form of Valerius' similes plays an important part in his narrative technique as a whole.¹

For the first purpose, a certain amount of statistics will have to be used.² On the subject of similes, unhappily, statistics run the risk of being not only distasteful but also disputable, since critics tend to disagree on exactly what constitutes a simile, and what differentiates it from a comparison. On this question I quote from a recent study of Vergil's similes by W. J. O'Neal. The characteristic of a simile is

¹ An earlier version of this paper was read at the APA annual meeting on December 30, 1971. I wish to acknowledge the helpful suggestions of Professors Frederick M. Ahl and S. E. Scully.

The most detailed treatment of the form of Valerius' similes is Otto Bussenius, *De Valerii Flacci in adhibendis comparationibus usu* (Lübeck 1872), henceforth cited by the author's last name. Valerius' similes are also discussed by Walter C. Summers, *A Study of the Argonautica of Valerius Flaccus* (Cambridge 1894) 59–60, and H. E. Butler, *Post Augustan Poetry* (Oxford 1909) 195–97.

² In compiling statistics I have used Courtney's Teubner text of Valerius (1970), H. Fränkel's Oxford text of Apollonius Rhodius (1961), Mynors' Oxford text of Vergil (1969), Housman's Lucan (1926) and Garrod's Oxford text of Statius (1906, 1954).

that it "asserts a figurative comparison between two objects which are essentially or accidentally different. . . . The comparison between two objects must be made figuratively and must not be literally true."³ Thus there is no objection to the two objects compared within a simile being of the same class (e.g., men compared with men), so long as the figurative element is present. These distinctions may be illustrated by two examples. In Book 2 of Valerius' epic, the Argonauts spending their first night at sea are compared to a traveller overtaken by night on an unfamiliar road (lines 43-47). This is a simile; the people compared in it are different by identity and circumstances. On the other hand, at *Aeneid* 6.491-92 the flight of the Greek shades before Aeneas is compared to their flight to the ships during the Trojan war.⁴ Here we have a simple comparison, the basis of which is factual rather than figurative or hyperbolic. In arriving at totals, I have tried to apply these criteria consistently. Therefore the comparisons themselves, which are the sole reason for introducing statistics in this paper, should be valid.

At the outset it will be useful to make a distinction between the relatively short simile—to use a Valerian example, *turbinis in morem* (2.90)—and the more detailed and developed simile which is characteristic of epic (the epic simile). A useful criterion to distinguish the two types is the presence or absence of a finite verb within the simile.⁵ A simile without a finite verb (phrase-simile) is almost invariably brief, whereas a simile with a verb (clause-simile) is usually more developed.

It is instructive to look at the proportion of phrase-similes to clause-similes used by Valerius and other writers. Valerius' primary source, Apollonius Rhodius, has a high proportion of phrase-similes in his

³ W. J. O'Neal, *The Form of the Simile in the Aeneid* (Diss. Univ. of Missouri 1970) 9-10. This work (henceforth cited by the author's last name) contains much material of general relevance to the study of epic similes.

⁴ This example of a comparison is used by O'Neal pp. 8, 10. It is important to bear in mind that the distinction between simile and comparison is not an ancient one; see Marsh H. McCall Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Simile and Comparison* (Cambridge, Mass. 1969) *passim*.

⁵ For this criterion see O'Neal p. 12. It has appeared not infrequently in modern scholarship on similes; e.g., Samuel E. Bassett, "The function of the Homeric simile," *TAPA* 52 (1921) 132-47, p. 135. The criterion is generally valid for Valerius' usage, though it should be pointed out that three of his phrase-similes (3.101, 6.607, 8.90) are longer than one line, whereas a few of his clause-similes are no more than one line in length (e.g., the first simile of the work, 1.319).

Argonautica; they constitute 45% of the similes in that poem. On the other hand, of the similes in the *Aeneid* only 22% are phrase-similes. As for Valerius, his usage is much closer to Vergil's than to Apollonius'; phrase-similes account for only 15% of all his similes.⁶ The explanation for this similarity between Vergil and Valerius, and the difference between them and Apollonius, is to be found in the associations of the two types of simile. The developed simile belongs specifically to high poetry, whereas the shorter simile is at home in almost any context. Thus Quintilian, in his discussion of short similes—his examples are *vagi per silvas ritu ferarum* and Cicero's *quo ex iudicio velut ex incendio nudus effugit*—remarks that similar examples can be recalled from everyday conversation: *quibus similia possunt cuicumque etiam ex cotidiano sermone succurrere* (*Inst.* 8.3.81).⁷ So it is natural that Vergil, who is concerned to maintain the *altum genus dicendi*, should use a high proportion of developed similes. And it is equally natural that Apollonius, whose tone is so much lighter, should use many more phrase-similes. This analysis is confirmed by the fact that Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, another relatively light-hearted work, has a high proportion of phrase-similes—38%,⁸ which is close to Apollonius' 45%. In this respect, at least, Valerius avoids the usage of his chief source, Apollonius, and follows the high epic tradition of Vergil.

The atmosphere of high seriousness in Valerius is reflected in the subject-matter of his similes.⁹ A few examples will have to suffice here, since our concern is with style rather than subject-matter.¹⁰ At

⁶ The actual totals are: Apollonius, 63 phrase-similes out of a total of 139; Vergil *Aeneid*, 30 out of 135; Valerius, 20 out of 134. The phrase-similes in Valerius are: 1.611; 2.90, 106, 156, 630; 3.51, 101, 151; 4.152, 261, 401, 452, 531, 750; 5.543; 6.607; 7.459; 8.20, 90, 151.

⁷ Cf. [Demetrius] *On Style* 89–90. The author of this work, having distinguished between the concise comparison (*εἰκασία*) and the more detailed one (*παραβολή*), comments that the latter are poetic and “should not be used in prose lightly nor without the greatest care.” One notes that in Valerius six of the phrase-similes occur in speeches, but none of the clause-similes.

⁸ The actual figure is 74 phrase-similes out of a total of 195.

⁹ The lapdog simile at 7.124–26 might seem to be an exception. However, M. Coffey, *A Study in Imagery in Latin Verse of the Silver Age* (Cambridge Univ. Thesis 1954) 70, takes up a point made by Langen in his commentary *ad loc.*, that the echo of Vergil (*Aen.* 7.490) in these lines shows an attempt by Valerius to keep the simile on the high-poetic plane. Coffey concludes that “bathos is not intended as a rhetorical tour de force.” (I am grateful to Dr. Coffey for letting me see a copy of his work.)

¹⁰ Two studies which pay close attention to the content of the similes are J. E. Shelton,

the moment when Jason has seized the Golden Fleece and draped it over his shoulders, Apollonius compares him to a girl delighted with the effect of the moonlight on her silk gown (4.167-70). Valerius will have none of this frivolity. He uses the much more heroic comparison of Hercules wearing the pelt of the Nemean lion (8.125-26). Similarly in the boxing-match between Amycus and Pollux, Apollonius uses an everyday scene—a busy shipyard filled with the noise of hammering (2.79-82)—whereas Valerius uses the smithy of the Cyclops (4.286-88); and when Medea flees from her father's palace, Apollonius compares her to a girl recently enslaved and running away from a cruel mistress (4.35-39), while Valerius uses the tragic overtones of the Ino myth (8.21-23).

Since the phrase-similes are of minor importance, the main body of this paper will be concerned with Valerius' clause-similes. One characteristic of these is that they are written in a compressed, concentrated style. Two examples will illustrate the point clearly. The first is used by Valerius at the point in the story when Medea in Colchis has fallen in love with the newly-arrived Jason, and comes to meet him at a secret rendezvous, at night, near the temple of Hecate.

in mediis noctis nemorisque tenebris
inciderant ambo attoniti iuxtaque subibant
abietibus tacitis aut immotis cyparissis
adsimiles, rapidus nondum quas miscuit Auster. (7.403-06)

Valerius has here remodelled a simile which is introduced by Apollonius at the corresponding point of his narrative:

τῷ δ' ἄνεω καὶ ἄναυδοι ἐφέστασαν ἀλλήλοισιν,
ἢ δρυσὶν ἢ μακρῇσιν εἰδόμενοι ἐλάτῃσιν,
αἵ τε παρᾶσσον ἔκῃλοι ἐν οὖρεσιν ἐρρίζωνται
νηνεμῖη, μετὰ δ' αὖτις ὑπὸ ῥιπῆς ἀνέμοιο
κινύμεναι ὁμάδῃσαν ἀπείριτον—ὥς ἄρα τῷγε
μέλλον ἄλσι φθέγξασθαι ὑπὸ πνοιῇσιν Ἑρωτος. (3.967-72)

Apollonius' simile is clearly more expansive than Valerius', occupying almost four lines whereas Valerius' occupies only two. The effect of

A Narrative Commentary on the Argonautica of Valerius Flaccus (Diss. Vanderbilt Univ. 1971) and H. J. Shey, *A Critical Study of the Argonautica of Valerius Flaccus* (Diss. Univ. of Iowa 1968).

expansiveness in the Greek is increased by the fact that Apollonius explains part of the point of the comparison—namely that the wind which will set the trees rustling symbolises Eros who will set Jason and Medea talking. Valerius' simile on the other hand is much more terse and compressed, and he leaves the reader to work out for himself what is suggested by the South Wind which has not yet entangled the trees. Finally some of the new details in Valerius are significant and suggestive. In place of oaks and fir-trees, Valerius has firs and cypress-trees: to the ancients, of course, the cypress was a tree of ill-omen, associated with death. (Such associations suit Valerius' purpose of emphasising the doom which hangs over this love-affair.) And the South Wind will soon entangle or intertwine the trees; the verb *misceo* suggests sexual union, as well as the interweaving of two destinies.¹¹

The second example occurs at the end of the battle between the Argonauts and the people of Cyzicus. The Argonauts were hospitably entertained at first by the people of Cyzicus, but when they sailed away they were blown back by the wind, and attacked by their hosts, who mistook them in the darkness for enemies. As dawn breaks, the Argonauts realise that they have been fighting and killing their friends, and they are overcome by horror. Then comes the simile:

tenet exsanguis rigor horridus artus,
 ceu pavet ad crines et tristia Pentheos ora
 Thyias, ubi impulsae iam se deus agmine matris
 abstulit et caesi vanescunt cornua tauri. (3.263-66)

This is again intense, compressed writing, full of suggestion. It relies on allusion. Having given a clear hint with the reference to Pentheus in 264, Valerius leaves it to the reader to understand that the *Thyias* is Agave, that *deus* refers to Bacchus, and that the *taurus* of 266 refers to Pentheus as he appeared to Agave in her maddened state. Thus the reader is drawn into imagining the scene for himself. This effect is particularly noticeable in the last phrase—*et caesi vanescunt cornua tauri*. With these words Valerius makes the reader look at the head of Pentheus through the eyes of Agave, as her vision fades and she sees the head for what it is.

¹¹ Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.60 *cum matre corpus miscere*. One cannot pass over other stylistic features which add to the effectiveness of these lines: the skilful alliteration; the metrical heaviness of *aut immotis*; and the expressive elision in *ambo attoniti*.

The concentrated style of Valerius' similes is closely connected with their characteristic brevity. His clause-similes are on average just under three lines in length (2.95, to be precise), whereas for Vergil the average is almost four lines (3.94) and for Apollonius a little less than that (3.72).¹² Now the average difference of one line between Valerius and Vergil, and rather under one line between Valerius and Apollonius, may not sound terribly important, but within the small compass of an epic simile it is highly significant. The longer a simile is, the more details can be added—details which are not essential to the main point of the comparison. One might illustrate this point by quoting two similes of average length for their respective authors, the first of four lines from Vergil and the second of three lines from Valerius. The first is applied to Aeneas as he considers events in Latium:

atque animum nunc huc celerem nunc dividit illuc
in partisue rapit varias perque omnia versat,
sicut aquae tremulum labris ubi lumen aënis
sole reppersum aut radiantis imagine lunae
omnia pervolitat late loca, iamque sub auras
erigitur summique ferit laquearia tecti. (8.20–25)

The Valerian example is used of the Argonauts as they relax their efforts after rowing through the Clashing Rocks:

tunc fessas posuere manus, tunc arida anhel
pectora, discussa quales formidine Avern
Alcides Theseusque comes pallentia iungunt
oscula, vix primis amplexi luminis oris. (4.699–702)

The Vergilian simile has a relatively leisurely quality, created in part by the expansive alternatives of 23 and the carefully visualised detail of 25. In the second example, on the other hand, one feels that Valerius has allowed himself only just enough space to sketch in the scene which he has in mind.

The longer the simile, then, the more it is likely to contribute to an unhurried quality in the narrative. To take a more lengthy example from the *Aeneid*, the reader is allowed to linger over the picture in Book 1 (430–36) of the activities of the bees in early summer, as they

¹² Valerius' clause-similes are also notably shorter than those in Lucan and in Statius' *Thebaid* (average length 3.45 and 3.74 lines respectively).

fill the cells of the comb with honey, keep the drones from the hive, and so on. Of course, extended similes of this sort are a familiar feature of Vergil's style. He has 21 similes over five lines in length in the *Aeneid*: some of them extend to seven or eight lines. It is precisely these expansive similes which are absent in Valerius. He has only three similes over five lines in length, as opposed to Vergil's 21: and none of these three is longer than six lines.¹³ Since these lengthy similes are largely absent in Valerius, the leisurely atmosphere which they help to create is also largely absent.

The brevity of Valerius' similes can be linked with another important feature, namely their frequency. Valerius uses 114 clause-similes¹⁴ in his relatively short epic, which means that there is on average one clause-simile every 49 lines. This frequency is considerably higher than that in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (one every 77 lines) and almost twice as high as that in the *Aeneid* (one every 94 lines). These two features of the similes, brevity and frequency, together contribute to the nervous, intense atmosphere of much of Valerius' epic. There is a relatively quick succession of pictures, drawn in sufficient detail to allow a definite image to form in the reader's mind, but not allowing him to linger over it for very long.¹⁵

This effect is particularly noticeable where one finds a concentration of similes in Valerius' narrative. In most books of the *Argonautica* there is in fact a single episode which contains a far higher proportion

¹³ Similes over four lines in length: 13 (11%) in Valerius, 39 (37%) in the *Aeneid*. Cf. Bussenius 3-4.

¹⁴ They are: 1.319, 489, 682, 690, 704, 726, 757; 2.43, 192, 227, 385, 458, 465, 505, 515, 522, 546; 3.53, 65, 83, 91, 108, 130, 163, 208, 224, 264, 281, 359, 465, 558, 577, 581, 587, 633, 737; 4.44, 104, 195, 202, 236, 268, 280, 286, 321, 368, 507, 604, 661, 684, 686, 700, 715; 5.22, 67, 80, 92, 163, 191, 304, 343, 368, 408, 521, 565; 6.112, 163, 167, 169, 260, 346, 353, 358, 383, 390, 402, 410, 420, 492, 505, 527, 611, 613, 632, 664, 711, 755; 7.24, 83, 111, 124, 147, 213, 301, 375, 400, 405, 560, 567, 581, 604, 607, 623, 635, 645; 8.21, 27, 32, 115, 125, 228, 239, 446, 455. Bussenius, who gives a total of 111 (p. 2 with note 10), omits 12 similes which I include, but counts nine (1.68, 406; 2.495; 5.90; 6.76; and four phrase-similes) which I exclude. Walter C. Summers, *A Study of the Argonautica of Valerius Flaccus* (Cambridge 1894) 59, gives a total of 117 similes; he includes 11 (1.406; 2.495; and nine phrase-similes) not counted by me, but leaves out eight which I would count.

¹⁵ The frequency of clause-similes in Statius' *Thebaid* (one every 45 lines) is virtually the same as in Valerius. However the effect is very different, since Statius uses the lengthy similes which Valerius avoids; 49 of the 217 similes in the *Thebaid* exceed five lines, as against three out of 114 similes in Valerius.

of similes than the rest of the narrative. These episodes are usually quite brief, varying in length from about 100 lines to rather over 200.¹⁶ They are as follows:

- Book 2 The rescue of Hesione by Hercules (particularly lines 451-549)
- Book 3 The battle between the Argonauts and the people of Cyzicus (particularly lines 43-272)
- Book 4 The boxing-match between Amycus and Pollux (particularly lines 174-329)
- Book 6 The struggle over the body of Canthus, and the episode of Ariasmenus' scythed chariots (lines 342-426)
- Book 7 Jason's struggle with the fire-breathing bulls and the earthborn men (lines 553-653)
- Book 8 The seizure of the Golden Fleece and the flight from Colchis (lines 1-133)

Book 2 provides a clear example: there are 15 similes altogether in the Book, and eight of them are concentrated within the 99 lines of the Hesione episode. In Book 3, out of a total of 22 similes, 13 are devoted to the battle-episode: and so on. It is interesting to note how the concentration of similes is achieved in Book 6. Here there was no single episode which Valerius wished to highlight. Instead he chose *two* brief but dramatic events from the fighting, set them side by side, and illustrated them both with a large number of similes. Together they occupy 85 lines which contain eight similes. This example suggests that Valerius had a conscious predilection for a concentration of similes highlighting one section of a Book. In these passages, the reader is confronted with a series of brilliant, quickly-drawn images, coming one after the other. The effect is almost kaleidoscopic. It is no accident, of course, that these concentrations come in episodes of high excitement—usually a physical struggle or contest, but not always, as the example of Book 8 shows.

Now the technique of concentrating similes within one episode in

¹⁶ One also finds smaller clusters of similes at significant points in the narrative: e.g., Pelias' revenge, 1.700 ff. (notable in view of the paucity of similes in 1); the rape of Hylas and Hercules' anger, 3.551 ff.; the Cyanean rocks, 4.656 ff.; Medea's turmoil of mind, 7.101 ff.

particular can be seen also in Apollonius Rhodius.¹⁷ Apollonius treats in this way three of the episodes which are highlighted by Valerius—the boxing-match between Pollux and Amycus (Book 2), Jason's struggle with the firebreathing bulls (Book 3), and the seizure of the Golden Fleece (Book 4). But one should emphasise that this is only three of the six Valerian episodes. What of the remaining three? One of them, the fight with the people of Cyzicus—so important in Book 3 of Valerius—is insignificant in Apollonius; and the other two, the rescue of Hesione and the civil war in Colchis, are original to Valerius. So it is fair to say that Valerius has taken over a technique from Apollonius and put it to his own use, rather than slavishly imitating Apollonius.¹⁸ Incidentally, one might also note at this point that Valerius displays a certain classical restraint in his narrative of the firebreathing bulls and the earthborn men in Book 7. Apollonius exuberantly piles simile on simile in the corresponding passage (3.1191–1407), reaching a grand total of 22 in 217 lines, and the whole effect is rather overwhelming. Valerius uses just eight similes for the episode; he should certainly be given credit for knowing where to stop.¹⁹

Books 1 and 5 of Valerius' work have a notably lower proportion of similes than the rest. In Book 1, the smaller number of similes is in keeping with the generally low-keyed atmosphere. Valerius deliberately

¹⁷ In the *Iliad*, the frequency of similes tends to rise in passages describing fighting; this is sometimes true throughout whole Books (notably 11, 13, 16 and 17). However, one can hardly speak of highlighted episodes, partly because the "episodes" of the *Iliad* are so different in kind from those of the *Argonautica*. (There are, of course, many small clusters of similes, e.g., at the end of the Greek Catalogue in Book 2.) There are so few similes in the *Odyssey* that it is impossible to speak of concentrations of them, except perhaps in the second half of Book 5 (episode of Odysseus' raft). In the *Aeneid*, passages of fighting again have a high frequency of similes: 2.298–505, 9.659–818, 11.597–835, 12.672–952.

¹⁸ Valerius' independence is also indicated by the fact that in the three simile-studded episodes which were taken over from Apollonius, Valerius deliberately avoided using the same similes as his predecessor; he takes over only six of the 41 similes used by Apollonius in these episodes, and even some of these six are so altered as to be virtually new similes.

R. W. Garson has examined in detail the respective handling of epic material by Apollonius and Valerius in a series of articles in *CQ* 13 (1963) 260–67, 14 (1964) 267–79 and 15 (1965) 104–20. He demonstrates that "Valerius follows Apollonius in the basic structure of his epic, but is capable of complete artistic independence in his choice of details" (*ibid.* 13.267).

¹⁹ The largest number of similes used by Valerius in a concentrated series is 13, in the battle-scene of Book 3.

avoided giving his narrative too much colour in this introductory Book, reserving himself for later. A similar explanation accounts for the low number of similes in Book 5. This Book is something of a new beginning, since the voyage to Colchis is completed and Valerius is virtually starting on a new subject with the entry of Medea into the story: *Incipe nunc cantus alios, dea* (5.217). Therefore Valerius keeps his narrative at a relatively slow pace.

There is at least one passage in Book 5 in which Valerius seems to be using similes to match the slower pace of the narrative. This is the first meeting of Jason and Medea, which happens by accident in Valerius' version, as Jason is exploring the land of Colchis. Of course, we know that this is a moment of great significance, the first link in a chain of passion and death. For this reason the meeting is highlighted by two similes which focus attention on the protagonists, one comparing Medea to Proserpina, and the other comparing Jason to the star Sirius. But nothing particularly dramatic happens, at least outwardly, in the meeting itself, although it is an ἀρχὴ κακῶν. Jason politely asks the way to Aeetes' palace; Medea is very much the shy, bashful maiden. In fact Valerius seems to be deliberately creating a contrast between the very proper, decorous attitude of Jason and Medea in this episode, and the passion which we know will later engulf them. The two similes are appropriate to this slow, quiet atmosphere. They are both unusually long for Valerius, each covering five lines, and they have a stately, expansive quality which is rarely found at moments of greater excitement:

florea per verni qualis iuga duxit Hymetti
aut Sicula sub rupe choros, hinc gressibus haerens
Pallados, hinc carae Proserpina iuncta Dianae,
altior ac nulla comitum certante, priusquam
palluit et viso pulsus decor omnis Averno; (5.343-47)

non secus, autumno quam cum magis asperat ignes
Sirius et saevo cum nox accenditur auro
luciferas crinita faces, hebet Arcas et ingens
Iuppiter; ast illum tanto non gliscere caelo
vellet ager, vellent calidis iam fontibus amnes. (5.368-72)

Furthermore, the fact that they are so obviously a pair—one simile for each of the protagonists, within 25 lines of each other, each occupy-

ing five lines—creates a feeling of formal balance which contributes to the unhurried atmosphere of the passage.²⁰ On the other hand, the content of the similes strengthens the tragic undertones of the meeting. The close of the first reminds us that Proserpina's beauty and happiness were doomed; the close of the second, that Sirius' brilliance is not only preeminent but also destructive.²¹

In discussing the simile of the motionless trees (V. F. 7.403–06, A. R. 3.967–72) earlier on, I pointed out that whereas Apollonius explicitly states the point of comparison after the simile, Valerius *ends* his sentence with the simile, leaving the reader to understand its application. Of these two forms of the simile, the first is in fact usual in Greek epic, whereas the second is more common in Roman epic from Vergil on.²² Now this Latin form, so to speak, of the epic simile can provide a particularly effective means of marking a division in the narrative. The simile guides the reader's imagination for a short time away from the main thread of the story, and this is an elegant way of rounding off an episode or paragraph. This technique is developed by Vergil, who uses it 11 times in the *Aeneid*. It is taken further by Valerius, who obviously likes the technique and employs it 19 times in his much shorter epic. On the other hand, Valerius is

²⁰ I do not suggest that a correlation can always be found between the frequency or the length of similes in any given passage and the precise degree of intensity in that passage. But such a correlation does appear on the one hand in this passage of Book 5, and on the other hand in the episodes of high excitement mentioned earlier.

²¹ These similes are an interesting example of Valerius' adaptation of Apollonian material. Apollonius has an Artemis-simile for Medea, together with a Sirius-simile for Jason, in a different context from Valerius, namely their rendezvous at the temple of Hecate (3.876–94 and 897–99). Valerius has (a) substituted Proserpina for Artemis, and also echoed Vergil's simile for Dido at *Aen.* 1.498–502, thus giving the first simile tragic undertones; (b) moved the similes from the context of Jason and Medea's rendezvous to a first meeting, where they take on wider meanings for the whole coming love-affair; (c) made them more definitely a pair, by removing an intervening simile in Apollonius (3.919–21) and giving them equal length. For a matched pair of similes used in an introductory passage one may compare Lucan's similes for Pompey and Caesar (1.136–43 and 151–57).

²² O'Neal terms the first type SA (simile-apodosis) and the second AS (apodosis-simile). He gives the following percentages: Homer—SA 93, AS 7; Apollonius—SA 70, AS 30; Vergil *Aeneid*—SA 40, AS 60; Lucan—SA 29, AS 71; Statius *Thebaid*—SA 27, AS 73. The percentages for Valerius' clause-similes, not given by O'Neal, are SA 40, AS 60; the same proportions as in Vergil.

more restrained than Statius, with whom the device becomes at times a positive mannerism.²³

It seems appropriate to end with one of these clausular similes of Valerius, drawn from the battle between the Argonauts and the subjects of King Cyzicus in Book 3. (An earlier simile from this episode was discussed above.) The Argonauts have killed Cyzicus and many of his people in ignorance during the night battle. In the dawn light they realise their mistake. The Argonauts, together with the relatives of the dead, mourn over the bodies of the fallen warriors and finally set them on pyres by the sea-shore and burn them. After paying final honours to the dead, the mourners depart: and the episode is closed with the simile:

tandemque quiescunt
dissona pervigili planctu vada, qualiter Arctos
ad patrias avibus medio iam vere revectis
Memphis et aprici statio silet annua Nili. (3.358–61)

In this beautifully written simile our vision is moved away from the human actors, away from the pyres on the sea-shore, to the sea itself: then right away from the scene of this episode, to Memphis and the sunny Nile. We are left for a moment with silence, emphasised by *quiescunt* (358) and *silet* (361).²⁴ One notices that the last line has a striking pattern of sound (centered on the long and short *i*-sounds) which helps to make it emphatic and final: and this clausular effect is increased by the internal rhyme, and most of all by the word-order of the last phrase, in which *aprici* qualifies *Nili*, *statio* is qualified by *annua*, and the verb *silet* stands at the very centre. A brilliant simile—brief, as Valerius' similes usually are—and brilliantly used to draw the episode to a close.

²³ It is used 83 times in the *Thebaid*. (Lucan, by way of contrast, has only seven examples.) These figures are based on paragraph-divisions in the texts mentioned in note 2. They include phrase-similes, which are however very rarely used in this way (only V. *Aen.* 6.702, V. F. *Arg.* 2.106).

²⁴ Crane-similes are traditionally used to illustrate the *noise* created by large numbers of people, e.g., *Il.* 3.2–7, *Aen.* 10.264–66, Stat. *Theb.* 5.11–16 and 12.515–18. Valerius has by a masterstroke reversed the tradition in order to capture the *silence* of a place where clamour has just ceased.