

Correspondence in similes.

*clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollit:
qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram
taurus et incertam excussit ceruice securim*
Aeneid 2, lines 222-224

He raises horrendous shouts to the stars. Like the bellowing when a wounded bull flees the altar and shakes the ill aimed axe from its neck.

In this simile there are many correspondences. It describes Laocoon's cries as the snakes wound him.

mugitus is likened to *clamores...horrendos* (horrendous shouts). Cows that are being sacrificed will bellow because they are distressed. This link between Laocoon and the bull's lowing shows his distress.

①

saucius refers to Laocoon's wounds from the snakes.

②

taurus. The bull is Laocoon who is a priest to Neptune and chosen by lot (Line 21 Laocoon, ductus Neptuno sorte sacerdos). Bulls are sacrificed as a gift to the gods and so was Laocoon.

③

incertam badly aimed. The wounds Laocoon receives from the snakes are badly aimed and reckless. He is trying to fight off the snakes and as a result his fight with them would have resulted in them missing their aim at times.

excussit shook off. Laocoon tries to fight off the snakes (line 220 *tendit divellere*). Despite the wounds both Laocoon and the bull attempt to free themselves.

④

ceruice at its neck. The snakes have wound themselves around Laocoon and are crushing him live.

⑤

fugit flees. Both Laocoon and the bull try to escape their fate. Laocoon attempts to fight the snakes and tear himself away and the bull flees from the altar.

⑥

Conclusions

Similes are used throughout the text in order to substitute the narrative with imagery. Where gaps in the description of crucial events occur in the narrative, the imagery provided by a simile can help to clarify the action for the readers. In the bull simile Vergil describes a bull being sacrificed in place of Laocoon's death. The audience is not made aware directly that Laocoon has been killed by the snakes by the narrative, but by the implications supplied by the image created by the simile. The simile bridges the gap in the narrative by using knowledge the audience would have had about the circumstances surrounding a sacrifice to show that Laocoon is a victim and will not survive his fate. Laocoon has already been described as sacrificing a huge bull at the altar so the audience can appreciate that the imagery of Laocoon sacrificing a bull is mirrored in the simile of a bull escaping the altar, where Laocoon is no longer in control but he has now become the victim.

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Similes can be used to describe an event that the audience has limited or no knowledge of by comparing the circumstances to things they would have been able to grasp understanding from. In the bull simile the audience would have had no experience of giant snakes but by linking the circumstances of Laocoon's death to a ceremonious sacrifice the audience would have been able to draw out the emotions of the scene by applying their own knowledge. As at a sacrifice the fate of the bull is out of his control they would have an understanding of Laocoon's powerlessness.

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