The Miltonic Smile

I. Observer similes
   1. 1.193 ff., the pilot of the night-foundered skiff
   2. 1.284 ff., the Tuscan artist (Galileo)
   3. 1.301 ff., the sojourners of Goshen (Israelites)
   4. 1.777 ff., the belated peasant

II. Theories of the Miltonic Simile
   1. Stanley's Fish's temporalization of the simile
   2. Geoffrey Hartman's spatialization of the simile

III. Simile and Orthodoxy

The precursors of Milton's "autumnal leaves . . . in Vallombrosa" (PL 1.300-304):

   Why ask my birth, Diomedes? Very like leaves
   upon this earth are the generations of men--
   old leaves cast on the ground by wind, young leaves
   the greening forest bears when spring comes in.
   So mortals pass; one generation flowers
   even as another dies away. (Iliad 6.148ff., trans. Fitzgerald)

   Here a crowd came streaming to the banks
   Mothers and men, the forms with all life spent
   Of heroes great in valor, boys and girls
   Unmarried, and young sons laid on the pyre
   Before their parents' eyes--as many souls
   As leaves that yield their hold on boughs and fall
   Through forests in the early frosts of autumn. (Aeneid 6.309 ff., trans. Fitzgerald)

   As, in the autumn, leaves detach themselves,
   first one and then the other, till the bough
   sees all its fallen garments on the ground,

   similarly, the evil seed of Adam
   descended from the shoreline one by one,
   when signaled, as a falcon--called--will come.

   so do they move across the darkened waters;
   even before they reach the farther shore,
   new ranks already gather on this bank. (Inferno 3:112 ff., trans. Mandelbaum)

For the shield simile, cf. Iliad 19.373 and Aeneid 3.637
Galileo's Siderius Nuncius (Starry Messenger) (1610)
For other appearances of Galileo in Paradise Lost, see 3.588, and 5.261