

that part of the general suffering which touches Macduff most nearly, and at last tells him exactly what has happened.

General terms sometimes by their very vagueness stimulate the imagination. For example:—

“Will no one tell me what she sings? —  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
For *old, unhappy, far-off things.*”<sup>1</sup>

“A *privacy* of glorious light is thine.”<sup>2</sup>

“Enclosed  
In a tumultuous *privacy* of storm.”<sup>3</sup>

“Or Music pours on mortals  
Its beautiful *disdain.*”<sup>4</sup>

“Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul, *the mistake*,  
Saul, *the failure, the ruin*, he seems now, — and bid him awake  
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set  
Clear and safe in new light and new life, — a new *harmony* yet,  
To be run and continued, and ended — who knows?”<sup>5</sup>

“But she —  
*The glory of life, the beauty of the world,*  
*The splendour of heaven, . . . . .*  
. . . . that’s fast dying while we talk.”<sup>6</sup>

“It has been noted how well-chosen is the epithet ‘water’ applied to a lake in the lines, —

‘On one side lay the ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.’

. . . In the night all Sir Bedevere could observe, or care to observe, was that there was ‘some great water.’ We do not — he did not — want to know exactly what it was. Other thoughts, other cares, preoccupy him and us. Again, of dying Arthur we are told that ‘all his greaves and cuisses were dashed with drops of onset.’

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth: The Solitary Reaper.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.: To a Sky-Lark.

<sup>3</sup> Emerson: The Snow-Storm.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: The World-Soul.

<sup>5</sup> Browning: Saul.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: The Ring and the Book; Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

‘Onset’ is a very generic term, poetic because removed from all vulgar associations of common parlance, and vaguely suggestive not only of war’s pomp and circumstance, but of high deeds also, and heroic hearts, since onset belongs to mettle and daring; the word for vast and shadowy connotation is akin to Milton’s grand abstraction, ‘Far off *His coming* shone,’ or Shelley’s, ‘Where the Earthquake Demon taught her young *Ruin.*’<sup>1</sup>

The proportion of general terms as compared with specific varies with the kind of composition. In philosophical works, for example, there is a larger proportion of general terms than in historical or dramatic; in Milton there is a larger proportion than in Shakspeare.

## SECTION II.

### FORCE.

In some kinds of composition, clearness is of primary importance. Such are judicial opinions, expositions of doctrine, chronicles of events, text-books of science, — all writings, in short, of which the sole purpose is to convey information. If, however, the communication of knowledge is not the sole aim, or if the reader’s attention cannot be taken for granted, the language should be not only clear but effective. A man whose eyes are shut or are turned away from an object will not see that object, however clear the atmosphere: he must be made to open his eyes and to turn them in the desired direction. Another man, though he sees the object, may take little interest in what he sees: his sympathies have not been awakened, his passions aroused, or his imagination set to work. The quality in language

<sup>1</sup> Roden Noel: The Poetry of Tennyson. The Contemporary Review, February, 1885.



that appeals to the emotions or the imagination is known under various names. Campbell calls it *vivacity*, Whately *energy*,<sup>1</sup> Bain *strength*; but a style may be vivacious without being energetic, or energetic without being strong, or strong without being vivacious. A better term is one borrowed from the nomenclature of science,— FORCE.

Proceeding to inquire how to choose words which shall give force to language, we perceive, in the first place, that many of the principles of selection which apply to clearness apply to force also. The univocal, short, specific, and familiar word will, in the great majority of cases, be the forcible word. Such, to take a simple instance, are words of which the sound suggests the meaning. For example: *whir, whiz, roar, splash, crash, crunch, thud, buzz, hubbub, murmur, whisper, hiss, rattle, boom, chickadee, cuckoo, whip-poor-will, bumble-bee, humming-bird*, and the italicized words in the following passages:—

Sound that suggests sense.

“On a sudden open fly  
With impetuous recoil and *jarring* sound  
Th’ infernal doors, and on their hinges *grate*  
*Harsh thunder.*”<sup>2</sup>

“On the ear  
*Drops* the light *drip* of the suspended oar,  
Or *chirps* the grasshopper one good-night carol more.”<sup>3</sup>

Such are many interjections: as, *heigh-ho! whew! hist! bang! ding-dong! pooh! hush!*

These and similar words are clear and forcible, both because they are specific, and because they are so familiar that they may be accounted natural symbols rather than

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle’s *ἐνέργεια*.

<sup>2</sup> Milton: *Paradise Lost*, book ii. line 879.

<sup>3</sup> Byron: *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, canto iii. stanza lxxxvi.

arbitrary signs; but when they become a mere trick of style, they lose their value. The safe course is neither to reject a word because its sound helps to communicate the meaning, nor to strain after such an expression at the risk of giving more importance to sound than to sense. In this, as in other matters, the appearance of art is offensive. A writer’s first duty is to be natural.

Thus it appears that in many cases a word fulfils the requirements of clearness and force equally well; but often an expression which is perfectly clear is deficient in force. If, for instance, a writer wishes to say something about a class of objects, he will be as well understood if he speaks of the class as if he presents a single object as a sample of the class; but the latter method will be the more likely to arrest attention. The contrast between the two methods is shown by Campbell:—

A clear expression not always forcible.

“‘Consider,’ says our Lord, ‘the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If, then, God so clothe the grass which to-day is in the field and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you?’”<sup>1</sup>

“Let us here adopt a little of the tasteless manner of modern paraphrasts by the substitution of more general terms, one of their many expedients of infrigidating, and let us observe the effect produced by this change. ‘Consider the flowers how they gradually increase in their size; they do no manner of work, and yet I declare to you that no king whatever, in his most splendid habit, is dressed up like them. If, then, God in his providence doth so adorn the vegetable productions which continue but a little time on the land, and are afterward put into the fire, how much more will he provide clothing for you?’”<sup>2</sup>

In the paraphrase the thought is expressed as clearly as in the

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 27, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell: *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, book iii. chap. i. sect. i.



original, and more exactly; but the comparison, in the original, between a common flower and the most magnificent of kings is far more striking than the expression of the same idea in general terms; and it is equally clear, for the mind, without conscious exertion, understands that what is true of the lily as compared with Solomon is true of all flowers as compared with all men.

Another example is furnished by the following passages: <sup>1</sup>—

“In large bodies, the circulation of power must be less vigorous at the extremities. Nature has said it. The Turk cannot govern Ægypt and Arabia, and Curdistan, as he governs Thrace; nor has he the same dominion in Crimea and Algiers, which he has at Brusa and Smyrna. Despotism itself is obliged to truck and huckster. The Sultan gets such obedience as he can. He governs with a loose rein, that he may govern at all; and the whole of the force and vigour of his authority in his centre is derived from a prudent relaxation in all his borders.” <sup>2</sup>

“In all the despotisms of the East, it has been observed, that the further any part of the empire is removed from the capital, the more do its inhabitants enjoy some sort of rights and privileges; the more inefficacious is the power of the monarch; and the more feeble and easily decayed is the organization of the government, &c.” <sup>3</sup>

The substitution of a less general for a more general term is the simplest kind of TROPE,<sup>4</sup> or figure of speech, — the word being *turned* from its usual  
Tropes. meaning and employed in a figurative, as distinguished from a literal, sense.

To enumerate all the classes into which tropes have been divided by rhetoricians would be to perplex and fatigue the reader. Tropes are, indeed, the very stuff of human language; for many words which have lost

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Burke's "Select Works" (Clarendon Press Series); Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Burke: Speech on Conciliation with America.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Brougham: Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers.

<sup>4</sup> Τρόπος, from τρέπω, turn.

their original meaning are now literal in a sense once figurative. Thus, we speak of an *edifying discourse*, but no longer of "edifying a cathedral;" of *spiritual ardor*, but not of the "ardor of a fire;" of an *acute mind*, but not of an "acute razor;" of *philosophical speculation*, but not of "speculation in those eyes;"<sup>1</sup> of the *levity of a conversation*, but not of the "levity of cork."

"Thinkest thou," asks Carlyle, "there were no poets till Dan Chaucer? No heart burning with a thought, which it could not hold, and had no word for; and needed to shape and coin a word for, — what thou callest a metaphor, trope, or the like? For every word we have, there was such a man and poet. The coldest word was once a glowing new metaphor, and bold questionable originality. 'Thy very ATTENTION, does it not mean an *attentio*, a STRETCHING-TO?' Fancy that act of the mind, which all were conscious of, which none had yet named, — when this new 'poet' first felt bound and driven to name it! His questionable originality, and new glowing metaphor, was found adoptable, intelligible; and remains our name for it to this day."<sup>2</sup>

Numerous words are still used in both a literal and a figurative meaning. Such are those originally applied to objects of the senses, and subsequently Words at once literal and figurative. extended to mental phenomena. Minds and mirrors alike *reflect*; there are *sources* of information as well as of rivers, *flights* of fancy as well as of birds; we *launch* new projects as well as new vessels; we *store* knowledge as well as merchandise; we *sound the depths* of grief as well as of water. We speak of "a *hard* lot," "a *soft* manners," "a *harsh* temper," "a *sweet* disposition," "a *sharp* tongue," "a *light* heart," "a *heavy* sorrow," "a *quick* mind," "a *white* soul," "a *stormy* passions."

Some words have been used so often in the same figure that the figure has lost its force; but, if the words retain

<sup>1</sup> Macbeth, iii. 4.    <sup>2</sup> Carlyle: Past and Present, book ii. chap. xvii.



their literal meaning, the figure may, in the hands of a skilful writer, become as fresh as ever. For example:—

“His diction is *flowing* and harmonious, and the ‘flowing’ may be said of it advisedly, because it always *finds its own level*.”<sup>1</sup>

“To convince Carp of his mistake, so that he would have to *eat* his own words with a good deal of *indigestion*, would be an agreeable accident of triumphant authorship.”<sup>2</sup>

A word that still exists in both a literal and a figurative sense should be used in a manner consistent with both meanings, whenever both meanings are likely to be suggested. One may “throw light” on obscurities but not *unravel* them, “unravel” perplexities but not *throw light* on them. Knowledge may be “drawn from” or “derived from” sources of information, but not *based on* or *repeated from* them.

“Our language,” says Bain, “has many combinations of words, indifferent as regards the metaphor, but fixed by use, and therefore not to be departed from. We say ‘use or employ means,’ and ‘take steps,’ but not *use steps*. One may *acquire* knowledge, *take* degrees, *contract* habits, *lay up* treasure, *obtain* rewards, *win* prizes, *gain* celebrity, *arrive at* honours, *conduct* affairs, *espouse* a side, *interpose* authority, *pursue* a course, *turn to* account, *serve* for a warning, *bear* no malice, *profess* principles, *cultivate* acquaintance, *pass over* in silence; all which expressions owe their suitability, not to the original sense of the words, but to the established usages of the language.”<sup>3</sup>

In another class of the tropes which invigorate expression, a part is put for the whole, a species for the genus, an individual for the species, the abstract for the concrete, or *vice versa*,—the figure in each of these cases being that which is called in the old books

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Browning: Letters to Richard Hengist Horne, letter xlii.

<sup>2</sup> George Eliot: Middlemarch, book iv. chap. xlii.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Bain: English Composition and Rhetoric, part i. chap. i.

*synecdoche*:<sup>1</sup> or the cause is put for the effect, the sign for the thing signified, an adjunct for the principal, an instrument for the agent, or *vice versa*,—the figure in each of these cases being called *metonymy*.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between synecdoche and metonymy still lingers in some school-rooms; but it is obviously of no practical value, for the force of tropes belonging to either class lies in the fact that they single out a quality of the object, or a circumstance connected with it, and fix the attention upon that. The quality or the circumstance thus emphasized should, of course, be the real centre of interest. Familiar examples are:—

*The bench, the bar, the pulpit*, for “the judges on the bench,” “the lawyers within the bar,” “the clergymen in the pulpit;” *horse and foot* for “soldiers on horseback and on foot;” *red tape* for “that which uses red tape;” “twenty *sail* in the offing” for “twenty vessels with sails;” “*The pen* is mightier than *the sword*”<sup>3</sup> for “The instruments of peace are mightier than those of war;” “Her *commerce* whitens every sea;” “He was all *impatience*;” “Up goes my grave *impudence*;”<sup>4</sup> “He keeps a good *table*;” “To be young was very *Heaven*;”<sup>5</sup> “The fortress was *weakness* itself;” “a *Daniel* come to judgement;”<sup>6</sup> “some village *Hampden*;”<sup>7</sup> “a *carpet-bag* senator;” “Go up, thou *bald head*;”<sup>8</sup> “bring down my *gray hairs* with sorrow to the grave.”<sup>9</sup>

The most common and, generally speaking, the most serviceable of tropes is the SIMILE or METAPHOR. The

<sup>1</sup> From *σύν*, together with, and *ἐκδέχομαι*, take or understand in a certain sense.

<sup>2</sup> From *μετά*, implying change, and *ὄνομα*, name.

<sup>3</sup> Bulwer (Lyttton): Richelieu, act ii. scene ii.

<sup>4</sup> The Tatler, No. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth: The Prelude, book xi.

<sup>6</sup> Shakspeare: The Merchant of Venice, act iv. scene i.

<sup>7</sup> Gray: Elegy written in a Country Churchyard.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Kings ii. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis xlii. 38.



two may be considered as one, since they differ only in form. The simile affirms that one object or act is like another; the metaphor calls one by the name of the other: that is to say, the simile expresses distinctly what the metaphor implies. Every simile can, accordingly, be condensed into a metaphor, and every metaphor can be expanded into a simile.

Similes and metaphors.

Lear's metaphor, —

“Ingratitude, thou *marble-hearted fiend*,”<sup>1</sup> —

if changed to “Ingratitude, thou fiend (or, thou who art *like a fiend*) with heart *like marble*,” becomes a simile. The simile affirms a resemblance between the heart and marble; the metaphor does nothing more, for the assertion that the heart *is* marble is a rhetorical exaggeration which deceives nobody.

Tennyson's metaphor, —

“Yet all experience *is an arch* wherethro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades  
For ever and for ever when I move,”<sup>2</sup> —

is easily changed to a simile that says the same thing in tamer language:—“Experience, in its relation to the unknown future, is *like an arch* in its relation to the yet unvisited world beyond it.”

All writers agree that, other things being equal, the metaphor is more forcible than the simile; but opinions differ as to the true explanation of this fact. According to Whately, who adopts the idea from Aristotle, the superiority of the metaphor is ascribable to the fact that “all men are more gratified at catching the Resemblance for themselves, than at having it pointed out to them;”<sup>3</sup> according to Mr. Herbert Spencer, “the great economy it achieves will seem the

Reason for the superiority of metaphors to similes.

<sup>1</sup> Shakspeare: King Lear, act i. scene iv.

<sup>2</sup> Tennyson: Ulysses.

<sup>3</sup> Whately: Elements of Rhetoric, part iii. chap. ii. sect. iii.

more probable cause:”<sup>1</sup> but neither explanation is altogether satisfactory. The truth seems to be that the metaphor, though shorter than the simile, does not achieve a “great economy” in mental effort. It usually demands more mental effort, but it enables us to make the effort with greater ease. We are “gratified,” but we are also stimulated.

A study of the metaphors in the following passages will show that they could not be changed into similes without loss of force: —

“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.”<sup>2</sup>

“A fine volley of words, gentlemen, and quickly shot off.”<sup>3</sup>

“She speaks poniards, and every word stabs.”<sup>4</sup>

“To wake our peace, which in our country's cradle  
Draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleep.”<sup>5</sup>

“Dead scandals form good subjects for dissection.”<sup>6</sup>

“In civilized society, law is the chimney through which all that smoke discharges itself that used to circulate through the whole house, and put every one's eyes out; no wonder, therefore, that the vent itself should sometimes get a little sooty.”<sup>7</sup>

“The academical establishments of some parts of Europe are not without their use to the historian of the human mind. Immovably moored to the same station by the strength of their cables and the weight of their anchors, they enable him to measure the rapidity of the current by which the rest of the world is borne along.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Spencer: The Philosophy of Style.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel xviii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Shakspeare: The Two Gentlemen of Verona, act ii. scene iv.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: Much Ado About Nothing, act ii. scene i.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: Richard II., act i. scene iii.

<sup>6</sup> Byron: Don Juan, canto i. stanza xxxi.

<sup>7</sup> Scott: Guy Mannering, vol. ii. chap. x.

<sup>8</sup> Dugald Stewart. Quoted in The Atlantic Monthly, November, 1883, p. 686 (note).