

RHETORIC *AND* COMPOSITION

刘养之 编著
李泽民



河南大学出版社

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修辞与作文

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INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric. Rhetoric is an ancient branch of learning. Founded by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, it has a history of more than two thousand years in Europe. At first it dealt mainly with the ways of persuading people in conversation and speech. Later the emphasis gradually shifted from speech to writing. Generally speaking, rhetoric is the art of effective communication by means of language; or, more simply, it is the art of expressing, by words, precisely what we mean.

Rhetoric and Grammar. Rhetoric bases itself on grammar, but it is not grammar. Grammar deals with the mutual relations of words in a sentence, while rhetoric deals with the choice of words and sentence structures in composition. The former teaches us correct speech; the latter teaches us better speech. Grammar is a pre-requisite of rhetoric.

Rhetoric and Composition. Rhetoric is the art of expressing our ideas in a skillful and effective manner. Its rules are merely common sense principles derived from the observed practice of persons who have succeeded in writing well—that is, from the methods of good authors. Composition simply means putting together; it is as practical as carpentry. As in carpentry we must know definitely what we are going to make, so in writing we must from the beginning have a clear idea of the finished product and also of the materials and the methods of putting them together. Hence, in a sense rhetoric may be called a science, and composition may be regarded as an art.

How to Study Rhetoric. The first step should be to learn to recognize the most commonly-used devices of ex-

pression and to analyze the different effects they produce. To be able to do this, it will not be enough merely to listen to a few lectures or read some books on rhetoric. Reading good authors with great care is necessary. The everyday speech of the common people is also full of clever and beautiful things which should be taken as important material of rhetoric, but foreign students of rhetoric can only study their speech as it is recorded in books.

Experience tells us that the study of rhetoric and the reading of good authors help each other.

It may be difficult to use rhetorical devices in our own writing and speech, but it is not impossible. Sometimes we may use them without knowing they are rhetorical devices. The study of rhetoric in theory should pave the way for its application in practice.

CHAPTER ONE

FIGURES OF SPEECH

The Value of Figurative Words. Words used for what they suggest, in a sense not exactly literal, are called figurative expressions. When we call a distinguished person a star, the world a stage, or the moon the lamp of night, we use the words star, stage and lamp of the night not in their literal sense, but with a fanciful application. Such language makes the thought more vivid and more striking, and therefore attracts more of the reader's attention.

Almost every notional word has both a literal and a figurative sense. The verb invent in "Paper was invented in China" and "Watt invented the steam engine" is used literally; in "When the teacher asked the boy why he had not come to class the day before, he invented an excuse" and "Jim often invents a story to amuse the children." it is used in a figurative or unusual sense.

When a student speaks of hammering away at his algebra, or says that he has just squeezed through an examination in French, or that a date in history has slipped his mind, he is using a figure of speech. The expressions noted are clearly more vivid than if he were to say that he is studying hard at his algebra, or that he has barely passed the examination, or forgotten the date. The general sense is the same in either case, but the language in the former instance suggests a livelier and more picturesque conception of the facts, and therefore attracts and holds the bearer's attention more certainly.

Again, if we say "Imperialism is on its last legs."

we intend the expression on its last leg to mean near its death or end. Such a figurative expression will not only express the literal truth of what we have said, but will, by effective language, create a vivid image in the reader's mind.

Figures of speech are of great use if they are not used to excess and if they are not far-fetched. It would be bad taste to make every sentence figurative, for instead of happy suggestions, the over-packed figures tend to become an endless nuisance to the reader. Every figure we use must be natural and harmonious with the idea it is intended to suggest. It should not be included in the sentence just to show one's ability to use it. A poor figure is much worse than a good literal expression.

Figures of speech are different kinds of figurative expressions. They are classified under three main headings, excluding minor figures. In this chapter the most important kinds of figures are given under each heading for reference. At the present stage of our study we need not try to acquire the skill to use every one of them. It is enough that acquaintance with them should help us to appreciate good literature at present and to write better compositions in the future.

I. Figures of Likeness

1. Simile.

Simile is an expression of comparison between two different things. It is usually introduced by "as" or "like", and sometimes also by "as...so", "than", and "resemble" as the signs of comparison.

The best similes are those in which persons or things unlike in most respects are compared because they have one point of likeness in appearance, qualities, or actions.

or in the effects which they produce. An allround likeness between two things will not offer a good simile, for then the comparison is literal, not figurative. To say a weak old mule is like a dying horse does not give one any new idea about the mule. But when one says that the capitalist system is like a dying horse, one is using simile to good effect.

Below are some examples of simile:

- (1) Mercy drops as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. (Shakespeare)
- (2) On National Day boys and girls are as happy as crickets.
- (3) It is four degrees below zero this morning. The wind tears the flesh like a saw, cuts it like the blade of a knife, stabs it like a poisonous needle, twists it like pincers and burns it like fire.
- (4) As a man whispers, so the breeze makes a low, hissing sound. [比作] 悄悄话, 悄悄话
- (5) He has bestowed on us verses sweeter than honey, more musical than the cymbal's note, more fragrant than the rose, purer than the azure of heaven!
- (6) Learning resembles scaling the heights. 攀登

Here are some sentences from *Jane Eyre*: 184

- (1) "Hold her arms, Miss Abbot: she's like a mad cat."
- (2) They...had thrust me upon a stool: my impulse was to rise from it like a spring.
- (3) I heard the rain still beating continuously on the staircase window, and the wind howling in the grove behind the hall; I grew by degrees cold as a stone, and then my courage sank.

Here the appearance of a girl or of a woman is likened to a very mad cat; the action of rising at one's impulse, to a spring; and the effect of cold, to a stone. Such figurative similes produced vivid, strong images in the reader's

mind.

The most expressive use of simile can be found in poetry. The following lines describe a ship at sea, which is unable to move because there is no wind:

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion,
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

(S. T. Coleridge: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*)

The poet uses a most expressive simile in these lines. We can easily imagine the reader seeming to hold his breath when he stares at the vivid picture of the immovable ship in his mind.

Note: The following expressions introduced by "like" and "as" are not figurative, but literal:

- (1) A cat is like a tiger.
- (2) A cat is as fierce as a tiger.

2. Metaphor *(metaphor)*

A metaphor is an implied simile. It differs from a simile in that the comparison is implied, not expressed. In other words, it calls one thing by the name of another, or describes one thing with some descriptive term which generally goes with something else. This transference is possible and desirable only when the two things in question have a striking likeness in a particular aspect.

"The imperialists and all reactionaries are paper tigers" is a metaphor known throughout the world. Reactionaries and paper tigers are two entirely different things, but they are surprisingly alike in one respect: in appearance they both look strong and terrible, but in fact they are weak and can be easily crushed or defeated.

It often happens that only one of the objects compared is named, the other thing being left to the imagination. In the expression, "The night had a thousand eyes." we think of the stars as if they were the eyes of a human being, and this produces a beautiful picture.

The comparison in metaphor may be implied in the use of nouns, adjectives, or verbs.

A. Nouns:

- (1) Life is a leaf of paper white,

Whereon each one of us may write

His word or two, and then comes-night.

(Lowell)

- (2) All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players.

(Shakespeare)

B. Adjectives:

- (1) There was a stormy discussion at our last meeting.

- (2) John has won golden opinions through his justice.

C. Verbs:

- (1) A bright idea suddenly struck me.

- (2) Crowds of villagers lined the street to welcome the distinguished visitor.

Read the following paragraph from George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, which describes the village of Raveloe. In it many words used metaphorically:

And Raveloe was a village where many of the old echoes lingered, undrowned by new voices. Not that it was one of those barren parishes lying on the outskirts of civilization—inhabited by meagre sheep and thinly scattered shepherds: on the contrary, it lay in the rich central plain of what we are pleased to call Merry England, and held farms which, speaking from a spiritual point of view, paid highly desirable tithes. But it was

nestled in snug well-wooded hollow, quite an hour's journey on horseback from any turnpike, where it was never reached by the vibrations of the coach-horn, or of public opinion. It was an important-looking village, with a fine old church and large churchyard in the heart of it, and two or three large brick-and-stone homesteads, with well-walled orchards and ornamental weathercocks, standing close upon the road, and lifting more imposing fronts than the rectory, which peeped from among the trees on the other side of the churchyard...

In poetry metaphor is as widely used as simile:

Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour on the stage
And then is heard no more ...

(Shakespeare)

3. Personification.

Personification is a figure of speech which represents an inanimate object, an animal, or an abstract idea as a person—as capable of thought, feeling and speech. This figure adds dignity, animation, and force to style.

There are three chief kinds of Personification:

A. That produced by the use of adjectives or pronouns. In this form of Personification, the qualities of living beings are attributed to inanimate things.

- (1) Look at the smiling moon. How bright she is!
- (2) A sea gull flew over the dimpling wave.
- (3) The thirsty soil drank in the rain.
- (4) The streets are dumb with show.
- (5) The pitiless cold bites shrewdly.
- (6) None preaches better than the ant, and she says

nothing .

- (7) The moon pours her light.

B. That produced by the use of verbs. Here inanimate things or abstract ideas are represented as having life.

- (1) The wind howled last night.
 (2) The flowers nodded to her as she passed.
 (3) Liberty veiled her face, while the tyrant spoke.
 (4) If MacGregor is allowed escape with such dishonour and disloyalty, then anarchy stares us in the face.

Uenaki 无颜的注视

(F. Aldridge: *The Diplomat*)

C. That produced by the use of nouns. Here personal nouns are used in connection with impersonal ones.

- (1) the anger of the tempest [*tempest*] 暴风雨
 (2) the smiles of spring a tempest in a teapot = 小事
 (3) the whisper of leaves in a tempest 小事引起轩

This figure is easily confused with metaphor. When we speak of a stony heart, we use a metaphor, for we make an implied comparison between the heart and the hard stone. If we say, "The very stone cried out," we use personification, for the comparison is not that of a person to the stone, but that of the stone to the person.

In the following passage from one of Gray's letters, whimsical personification gives a delicately humorous effect:

Low spirits are my true and faithful companions; they get up with me, go to bed with me, make journeys and return as I do; nay, and pay visits, and will even affect to be jocose and force a feeble laugh with me; but most commonly we sit alone together, and are the prettiest insipid company in the world.

Personification is often found in poetry. Shelley's