

Axis of Poetic Language

Figurative:

Words used for more than just their dictionary meanings
in ways that are inventive and surprising
figures of speech include similes, metaphors, personification, etc.

They were carbonated with joy: a concept expressed using a metaphor (we can picture carbonation, but the joy part is still abstract.)

Their laughter burst from them like carbonation escaping a shaken bottle: uses one concrete thing (carbonated liquid to describe another concrete thing (laughter): also implies an emotional state

Abstract:

Words that name concepts that only exist only in the mind and can't be perceived with the five senses

They felt joy. Joy is a real emotional state. We can't see joy.

Concrete:

Words that name things or qualities that can be perceived with the five senses

Their laughter was high pitched and uproarious: Describes the sound of a specific kind of laughter

Literal:

Words used for just their dictionary meanings:
intended to be taken at face value

Separation

-W. S. Merwin

Your absence has gone through me
Like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.

A Spiral Notebook

-Ted Kooser

The bright wire rolls like a porpoise
in and out of the calm blue sea
of the cover, or perhaps like a sleeper
twisting in and out of his dreams,
for it could hold a record of dreams
if you wanted to buy it for that
though it seems to be meant for
more serious work, with its
college-ruled lines and its cover
that states in emphatic white letters,
5 SUBJECT NOTEBOOK. It seems
a part of growing old is no longer
to have five subjects, each
demanding an equal share of attention,
set apart by brown cardboard dividers,
but instead to stand in a drugstore
and hang on to one subject
a little too long, like this notebook
you weigh in your hands, passing
your fingers over its surfaces
as if it were some kind of wonder.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, (340)

-Emily Dickenson

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through -

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum -
Kept beating - beating - till I thought
My mind was going numb -

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space - began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here -

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing - then -

Bait Goat

-Kay Ryan

There is a
distance where
magnets pull,
we feel, having
held them
back. Likewise
there is a
distance where
words attract.
Set one out
like a bait goat
and wait and
seven others
will approach.
But watch out:
roving packs can
pull your word
away. You
find your stake
yanked and some
rough bunch
to thank.

Difference

-Mark Doty

The jellyfish
float in the bay shallows
like schools of clouds,

a dozen identical — is it right
to call them creatures,
these elaborate sacks

of nothing? All they seem
is shape, and shifting,
and though a whole troop

of undulant cousins
go about their business
within a single wave's span,

every one does something unlike:
this one a balloon
open on both ends

but swollen to its full expanse,
this one a breathing heart,
this a pulsing flower.

This one a rolled condom,
or a plastic purse swallowing itself,
that one a Tiffany shade,

this a troubled parasol.
This submarine opera's
all subterfuge and disguise,

its plot a fabulous tangle
of hiding and recognition:
nothing but trope,

nothing but something
forming itself into figures
then refiguring,

sheer ectoplasm
recognizable only as the stuff
of metaphor. What can words do

but link what we know
to what we don't,
and so form a shape?

Which shrinks or swells,
configures or collapses, blooms
even as it is described

into some unlikely
marine chiffon:
a gown for Isadora?

Nothing but style.
What binds
one shape to another

also sets them apart
— but what's lovelier
than the shapeshifting

transparence of like and as:
clear, undulant words?
We look at alien grace,

unfettered
by any determined form,
and we say: balloon, flower,

heart, condom, opera,
lampshade, parasol, ballet.
Hear how the mouth,

so full
of longing for the world,
changes its shape?

A Glimpse of the Eternal

-Ted Kooser

Just now,
a sparrow lighted
on a pine bough
right outside
my bedroom window
and a puff
of yellow pollen
flew away.

A Washing of Hands

-Ted Kooser

She turned on the tap and a silver braid
unraveled over her fingers.
She cupped them, weighing that tassel,
first in one hand and then the other,
then pinched through the threads
as if searching for something, perhaps
an entangled cocklebur of water,
or the seed of a lake. A time or two
she took the tassel in both hands,
squeezed it into a knot, wrung out
the cold and the light, and then, at the end,
pulled down hard on it twice,
as if the water were a rope and she was
ringing a bell to call me, two bright rings,
though I was there.

Sestina in Prose

-Katharine Coles

It was like climbing a mountain to those of us who'd climbed one. To the others, it was like, I suppose, something else. In other words, we let everybody find her own figure of speech.

Not that it—speech—lay thick on the ground, or mountain; it presented itself one word at a time, far between. A body had to keep an eye out, like for firewood at dusk, or else

miss her chance. Nobody else, let's face it, cared about metaphor, or even simile, the like-it-or-not-ness of the mountain pretty much getting between a body and her musing, in its going. One

step at a time, anyone could lose herself or someone else just staring at her feet. And if a body meet a body is not mere speech but something that could happen, like hopping a bus—though on the mountain

you'll catch no rides, worse luck, the mountain requires to be climbed on foot, one after the other, nothing else will get you up it. There's nothing like such obduracy but in the wild, nobody can tell you otherwise. No simple figure,

this struggle: just a crag, your burden, and your own two feet. Say otherwise, talk through your hat, which I don't care for.

"A metaphor goes out and comes back; it is a fetching motion of the imagination."

"And yet, and yet—when a ship goes to another country and then returns, it always brings some kind of foreign vegetation attached to its hull. Under the waterline, some zebra mussel or termite is hunkered in the dark—and a metaphor, will always return from its journey with something unintended attached." -Tony Hoagland

"A simile is a metaphor that admits it's making a comparison. Similes tend to make you think; metaphors let you feel things directly." -Jane Hirschfield

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