

SIMILIE FOR THE CAMERA!

DANIEL W. GALEF
Montclair, New Jersey

Similes have a tendency to become entrenched in the language. Though they may originally be an expression of originality, a creative link between two ideas never before formed, they soon are overused and undervalued figures of speech not given a second thought by users, addicted to similes in the way that other users are addicted to methamphetamine. Because a simile has a set meaning belied by its expression, it refers only to one meaning or sense of its base word, like any unambiguous phrase. Relying on and overfrequently drawing from a well of hackneyed similes may lead to such misuses as the following:

ON RELUCTANTLY BUT GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTING THE GIFT OF AN ALMOST
CERTAINLY STOLEN GOLD WATCH FROM A DISHONEST PAWNBROKER AND OLD
FRIEND ON THE OCCASION OF MY THIRTIETH BIRTHDAY

My first mistake was accepting the word
of a wily member of the local fauna;
though the watch he gave me as free as a bird,
all his wares were as hot as a sauna.

The sheriff invited us later that night o'er for supper; I guessed he'd get violent;
I knew that he knew, and he knew that I knew that he knew, but I sat there silent.

Every bite of the food, of the drink every sip,
proved the chef was clever as a fox:
the cheddar was as sharp as a whip,
the liquor as strong as an ox.

There was something funny, though, about that whiskey, I thought as my lips I moistened;
I woke up that night in a prison cell, and I knew then that I had been poisoned.

Trapped in this airless and windowless coop,
my prospects were certainly frightening.
The chains 'round my wrists were as thick as pea soup;
I was stuck as fast as lightening.

My thoughts turned to flight: perhaps I could return to the embrace of my dear old Hillary;
but how could I manage to evade the cruel grasp of the jogs, the stocks, and the pillory?

I wondered if I could escape this dark cell,
if I could return home: whether
I could get to where windows were clear as a bell,
making rooms as light as a feather.

I worked my hands free, and I cut a long dash through dark: I ran for my life;
“Smile! You’re on Candid Camera!” shouted the sheriff, the pawn broker, and my wife.

My complete astonishment must have shone,
for their smiles were honest and bright.
Their humor was as dry as a bone,
but my spirits as high as a kite.■