

MORE FIGURES OF SPEECH

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Some time ago, a short piece of ours appeared in these pages -- a tale invented as a vehicle to illustrate Figures of Speech. It has been criticized as being saddening and inconclusive, as it undoubtedly is. For those who may not have seen it, it traces the movements of a couple of city-dwellers who had dreamed all their lives of taking a tropical vacation, but each time that it seemed within their reach, some unexpected expense had arisen, putting an end to the project. However, at long last they did get off, and all went happily with them until that awful day (their first on the Island) when a giant wave washed away her necklace (that had been an heirloom) and his new contact-lenses. As if Fate had not been unkind enough, when they returned to the hotel they discovered that their room had been burgled, and all their money had disappeared. A sad tale, indeed; but as we still have some Figures to examine, we are able to bring to the sympathetic reader the brighter half of our story.

First we must mention, though, that some Figures in the earlier account are repeated here. For this we ask the reader's indulgence, and can only say that some of them -- the Figures -- are very persistent.

Since our mention of Dizzy Deanisms in the previous article, a couple of items have come to hand that seem worthy of note: a small booklet, entitled "How To Talk Pure Ozark In One Easy Lesson", is a delightful collection of words and phrases used by our kinsmen in the mountains of the South. Its author, Dale Freeman, and his capable illustrator, Bob Palmer, evidently had a lot of fun with this, and it should find a place in any logophile's "labry".

Also, we have encountered the word Slode in an excerpt from Froissart (c. 1400): 'The same morning there had fallen a great dew, so that the ground was somewhat moist, and so in his going forward he slode and fell down. . . ' It might be more accurate to list such oddities as Archaisms, and give the Ozarks and Dizzy second billing.

And so to our continued story . . .

The coral island that our travelers elected to visit was called Ste Anne de Beaupré by its French discoverers; the British, later, called it St. Ann, and when it was conceded to the United States in the mid-50's it was called, simply, Burpy Island. Geographically,

it lies but a short distance above the Equator and covers an area of roughly 40 miles by 25 -- the longer of the two distances lying in a north-south axis. The Island is dominated by an extinct volcano some 4500 feet in altitude which virtually divides Burpy in two, for the massive, jungle-clad mountain -- called MacAbre -- springs abruptly from the sea on both the eastern and western shores and there is no easy access between the two halves except by boat. The Airport, mini-Capital, hotels, and, generally, the life of the Island is concentrated in the southernmost part. Small boats take excursion parties to the northern section, where one can fish, hunt for shells, and adventure into the fine, primeval forest where all kinds of animal- and bird-life abound.

Thither it was that our hero and heroine made their difficult way when disaster caught them and left them destitute. As neither was a strong enough swimmer to risk the tides and surf around the mountain's foot, and as no boat could be found to ferry them, this couple made their way through the tropical jungle until they reached the more level, savannah-like lowlands of the North. For two tenderfeet this was an incredible achievement; but life for both had reached such a hopeless impasse, and such resignation had fallen on them, that the discomforts and hazards of the trip counted little to them and it did not matter, now, whether they lived in the North or South of the Island: or, indeed, whether they lived on Burpy at all. They consoled each other with the thought (which they voiced from time to time) that at least they had each other -- which would have been a splendid morale-builder had they not been so infernally hungry.

However, by dint of imagination, courage, and a deal of hard work, survive they did in a kind of Swiss Family Robinson Crusoe fashion. More, they grew tough and wiry, and the sun's scorching fingers bronzed them beyond all recognition; they would have been quite unrecognizable to their old city friends. They became clever at snaring land-animals, adept with the bow and arrow and spear (which they fashioned themselves, of course), and expert at angling. Little by little they built themselves a jungle home, and spoke less and less, as into months the days lengthened, and into years the months, of the life they had left. They hardly ever looked up now to watch the daily plane bringing its daily quota of visitors to Burpy.

With crude knives of obsidian Tom carved wooden utensils, containers, bowls. From a native clay, Mary created cooking-pots and water jars and drinking cups, and colanders of calabash. The time came -- after how many years? -- when they were actually able to sit down once in a while and enjoy a quiet chat, although to tell the truth they had been so long cut off from normal human intercourse that words came hardly to them:

Tom: ...and you don't regret abandoning the City?

Mary: Oh, no, Tom. But I don't think 'abandoning' is the right word. After all, we didn't do it on purpose -- maybe 'leaving' would be better.

Tom: We're really lucky to have come to Burpy! Think of all the dangerous places we might have picked ...

Mary: ... with aborguineas up in the hills beating those drums

all night and nobody knowing when they might attack; and those prehyseric-looking guanos like something out of a science-fiction movie! But I'd swim more if it wasn't for those eclectic eels.

Tom: I'm of two minds about going away from here. After all, we did make money at home . . .

Mary: Yes, but money is -- what? We don't need it here, do we? It doesn't seem revelant . . .

The truth is that neither had ever looked in such radiant health, or ever felt better: and this should be the happy ending of this improbable story. But not to worry!

A postscript must be added, telling of a group of visitors to the Island, and of how they sailed to the North, exploring, and there discovered our stranded couple. The visitors were young, curious, and sympathetic: they heard their hosts' story and admired their courage and nimble fingers. They offered to buy some artifacts, but Tom would not sell, protesting that they were too crude, and, besides, had been used. On urging, he agreed to make reasonable copies, which satisfied the visitors, and they promised to return in a little, for the new bowls . . . and herewith began what might be called Phase 3 of our story. For come back they did, as they said they would, and were accompanied by friends who also bought bowls and pots, and who in turn returned with more friends, so that in the end the hunting and cooking and the housework were all left to Mary, while his days were entirely filled with the making of artifacts for his newly-found market. Money rolled in -- more money than they had seen in years -- and within a relatively short time they had stored away enough of it to buy two plane tickets to the United States. But do you buy them, happy castaways?

The rest of this article contains a discussion of the Figures used in the story. Certain references (asterisked) are to the corresponding discussion in the earlier article.

1. Burpy Island (substitute pronunciation). Occasionally, travelers are unable to pronounce place-names encountered in foreign lands, and substitute phrases or words from their own tongue with which they are more familiar. Examples of this tendency are not hard to find: tourists in Mexico had considerable trouble with the name of a small town on the road leading South to the Capital, called Tamazunchale, until it was discovered that 'Thomas and Charley' served as well as the difficult Aztec word. The hardy Spaniards, under the command of Cortez a few years before the Mexican tourist boom, had similar trouble with Quauhnahuac, and christened it Cuernavaca, the name the town bears today, and which means 'the horn of a cow' in Spanish. English soldiers of World War One renamed Premysl and Ypres 'Penny-Whistle' and 'Wipers', respectively. More often than not, however, the coinage does not attempt a meaningful phrase but, rather, a mere anglicizing of the

- foreign word. Such is Charing Cross in London, a corruption of the French 'chère reine'. Inasmuch as this tendency leads to words of like sound, we may perhaps consider it a form of Paronomasia (see 27*). We hope our coinage of 'Burpy' is justified.
2. ...tenderfeet (synecdoche). But, to paraphrase Bernstein's The Careful Writer, the difference between Synecdoche (see 10*) and Metonymy (see 3*) is very slight. And might we not have here euphemistic overtones?
 3. ...survive they did (anastrophe). Inversion of the natural order of words, for effect; 'So did she sit' (Beerbohm), and 'Blessed are the meek' (King James Bible) are other examples.
 4. ...the sun's scorching fingers (personification). This is the Latin-derived synonym of the Greek word Prosopopoeia. These are close to the Pathetic Fallacy (a coinage of Ruskin) which attributes living characteristics to lifeless things, but does not, however, make persons of them as does Personification. This word has an interesting derivation which need not detain us here but which etymologically-minded readers may like to look up.
 5. ...into months the days lengthened (anastrophe).
 6. ...wooden utensils, containers, bowls (asyndeton). The omission of conjunctions: 'I came, I saw, I conquered', attributed to Julius Caesar with perhaps as much justification as 'Able was I ere I saw Elba' to Napoleon, is a famous example.
 7. ...pots and water jars and cups and colanders (polysyndeton). Excessive use of conjunctions -- the opposite of 6.
 8. ...from native clay Mary created cooking-pots ... and drinking cups and colanders of calabash (alliteration). Repetition of sounds at the beginnings of words. A New York paper recently ran this caption for an article in its magazine section: Has Success Spoiled Sly Stallone?
 9. ...after how many years? (apostrophe). The American Heritage Dictionary defines this as turning from an audience to address an absent or imaginary person, thus creating a digression.
 10. ...words came hardly (archaism) The American Heritage Dictionary gives 'strenuously' as the fifth (obsolete) meaning of 'hardly'.
 11. ...abandoning the City (catachresis). Defined in Fowler's A Dictionary of Modern English Usage as the wrong application of a term, this is discussed in 21*. The memory is still green of President Carter's visit to Poland last year, and the unfortunate gaffe of his interpreter who used the Polish word for 'abandon' to describe the President's departure from Washington.
 12. ...aborguineas and prehysteric guanos and those eclectic eels (malapropism). Sheridan, the eighteenth-century playwright, gave us in his "Rivals" (1775) Mrs. Malaprop, one of the most charming and zaniest of characters. Most of us have our favorite malapropisms, and not a few of us number among our friends worthy descendants of the good lady! Broadly speaking, malapropisms may be divided into three categories: words similar in sound (a shrewd awakening), words opposite in meaning (we will not anticipate the past), and words used merely as mouth-filling epithets (I would never let her meddle with Greek, or Hebrew, or Algebra, or Simony, or Fluxions, or Paradoxes, or such inflammatory

branches of learning ...). P. T. Barnum put a malapropism to practical use with his 'This way to the Egress'; and a lady of our acquaintance is on record as saying 'Chairs in our family have a very high morality rate'. My friend, the Woodstock artist Walter Plate, once referred to a 'dimalsal' day; the New York Daily News recently ran a cartoon with the caption '... and don't call me illiterate -- my Ma and Pa have been married for 38 years'. But we must resist the temptation of multiplying examples.

13. ...going away from here (pleonasm). The practice of saying the same thing twice in the same expression. 'The most unkindest cut' is an example.
14. ...but money is -- what? (hyperbaton). Transposition of words out of normal order. Shakespeare has 'That whiter skin of hers than snow' and Max Beerbohm says of Zuleika Dobson 'Soundlier than ever slept she'.
15. ...revelant (malapropism).
16. But not to worry! (solecism). Ungrammatical combination of words in a sentence: 'I kid you not', 'Already yet', 'like there's no tomorrow' are fairly common examples. The word Solecism derives from the Greek word Soloikos, which comes in turn from Soloi, a Cilician town in which the Athenian colonists spoke a particularly corrupt dialect of Greek. But should a people who can caption an article 'Why to Eat Fruit' be over-critical?
17. ...nimble (epenthesis). Insertion of a letter or syllable to facilitate pronunciation. 'Nimble' used to be 'nimel' and our 'passenger', 'passager' in medieval times.
18. ...for come back they did (apostrophe).
19. ...more money than they had seen (apostrophe).
20. But do you buy them? (neologism). This is a special type of Neologism known as a Cliff-hanger. Cliff-hangers, as might be expected, leave the reader in suspense and are, of course, based on the serials of -- was it Pearl White, or Ruth Roland? Each episode left the heroine in a terrible predicament -- either strapped to a railroad track with an express train bearing down on her rapidly, or in a canoe about to go over the falls, or hanging by a finger from the edge of a cliff. Who can forget the ecstatic shiver that ran through us at that point? Comparable is another neologism, taken from baseball, describing a tense situation -- a White-knuckler. And let us not forget the old-timer -- now no longer a neologism -- the Hair-raiser.