

Very Like a Whale

One thing that literature would be greatly the better for
Would be a more restricted employment by the authors of simile and
metaphor.

Authors of all races, be they Greeks, Romans, Teutons or Celts,
Can't seem just to say that anything is the thing it is but have to
go out of their way to say that it is like something else.

What does it mean when we are told
That that Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold?
In the first place, George Gordon Byron had enough experience
To know that it probably wasn't just one Assyrian, it was a lot of
Assyrians.

However, as too many arguments are apt to induce apoplexy and
thus hinder longevity.

We'll let it pass as one Assyrian for the sake of brevity.

Now then, this particular Assyrian, the one whose cohorts were
gleaming in purple and gold,

Just what does the poet mean when he says he came down like a
wold on the fold?

In heaven and earth more than is dreamed of in our philosophy
there are great many things.

But I don't imagine that among them there is a wolf with purple
and gold cohorts or purple and gold anythings.

No, no, Lord Byron, before I'll believe that this Assyrian was
actually like a wolf I must have some kind of proof;

Did he run on all fours and did he have a hairy tail and a big red
mouth and big white teeth and did he say Woof Woof?

Frankly I think it is very unlikely, and all you were entitled to say,
at the very most,

Was that the Assyrian cohorts came down like a lot of Assyrian
cohorts about to destroy the Hebrew host.

But that wasn't fancy enough for Lord Byron, oh dear me no, he
had to invent a lot of figures of speech and then interpolate them,
With the result that whenever you mention Old Testament soldiers

to people they say Oh yes, they're the ones that a lot of
wolves dressed up in gold and purple ate them.

That's the kind of thing that's being done all the time by poets,
from Homer to Tennyson;

They're always comparing ladies to lilies and veal to venison,
And they always say things like that the snow is a white blanket
after a winter storm.

Oh it is, is it, all right then, you sleep under a six-inch blanket of
snow and I'll sleep under a half-inch blanket of unpoetical
blanket material and we'll see which one keeps warm,
And after that maybe you'll begin to comprehend dimly
What I mean by too much metaphor and simile.

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Likes: Cheri Gallagher, EOD, ac liberei, Gene5359, , Lilycoalbin, H e P, Ell Fleur, Zenda, Captain B2, Teiran CM, Dougbadenglish, Jonahcharis, What s in a name

Older comments



Cheri Gallagher - Lol

3 months ago



Dougbadenglish - Education is being given

2 years ago



H e P - Now then if I may say this, dear Ogden, what I miss, despite the absence of metaphor or simile, is the wit of brevity, although I really enjoyed the levity. But what you said is said, you can't condense, as you're already dead.

2 years ago



Ell Fleur - The over use of rhyme - Next, "strife" should be removed from language altogether.

3 years ago



Lilycoalbin - I have to applaud a plea for plain speech; even though metaphor and simile can be good, too much of anything, whether cooks or salt, will spoil the soup. Either Nash was bending the truth when he argued Assyrian vs. Assyrians, or he simply forgot about collective nouns, I don't know. The Chinese always refers to the whole population, not just one person. Same with deer or moose. These take the third person plural. We say Deer are hunted, not deer is hunted. With the case of the

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O'Zionn - I kind of love this. I found it very comical.

7 years ago



Old Eben Flood - Why do so many people take poems so literally and ascribe the thoughts expressed by the speaker in the poem to the author? There are a number of clues here to tell us that Nash is actually ridiculing the idea that metaphors and

similes are a flaw in poetry. The speaker is made to be a fool for not understanding how a wolf attacking a pen full of innocent, helpless sheep is a perfect picture of how the Assyrians attacked the Hebrew host. And how everyone understands that "the

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Comments from the archive



Anon2 - This sounds like Groucho Marx wrote it.

Is that a metaphor?

11 years ago



LarryATilander - So true and at least it rhymes.

11 years ago



momentarylapse - haha.brevity.what fun this must have been to write.bravo to mr ogden nash.not that i have that much beef on metaphors and similes.hehe

11 years ago



- From guest Bronte (contact)

It's the avalanche of similes employed by every person pushing a pen who can't describe a spade being a spade for fear it might not be seen as being an old digger. Onya Mr. Nash I whole heartedly agree with you.

11 years ago



rhondasail - I think Mr. Nash is very well welcome to his opinion, however, I would put forth the notion that generally most who read such poets as Byron,Homer, and Tennyson, adore the use of simile and metaphor. It is the life of such poetry. We all have our taste and preference, and as for me, I like rich poems full of succulent simile and fragrant metaphor. I will read Mr. Nash when in need of a touch of salt, or a cold hard slap in the face. 😊 Well written though he is, I simply disagree.

15 years ago