

# The Role of Analogy in Charles Dickens' *Pictures from Italy*

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## 1. Introduction

In the film *Notting Hill* (1999) Hugh Grant, playing a book-seller, throws a customer out of his travel book-shop for asking for books by Charles Dickens. But Dickens wrote two significant non-fiction travelogues. *American Notes* (1842), compiled largely from letters Dickens sent home to his friend John Forster, describes his trip to America and Canada January to June 1842. Some of his experiences fed into his novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4). Disappointed with the initial sales of that novel, Dickens took a break with his large family for almost a year in Italy, July 1844-June 1845, in a decade when Europe, including Italy itself was seething with revolution. He stayed mostly in Genoa as a base, first at Albaro, and then at the Palazzo Peschiere ('palace of fish-ponds'). Again, he wrote letters home to Forster, and then published a travelogue based on these letters and his memories in 1846: *Pictures from Italy*. Part of this work had first appeared in *The Daily News* which he himself edited, as a series of 'travelling letters written on the road', a genre for which there was a current vogue. He returned to Italy in 1853, and both his sojourns helped him for his novel *Little Dorrit* (1855-6).

*Pictures from Italy* did not actually appear in Italy until 1879; and was translated into Italian only in 1911 (Paroissien (ed.) 1989:24). Apart from introductory comments by its British editors, there has been very little 'extended analysis' of the work as a 'literary text' (Davies 1989:65). In this paper I am specifically concerned with what I see as the significant role of analogy in the work, analogy taken in the broadest sense to cover generically what are conventionally termed similes (with *like* or *as*), quasi-similes (*as if*) and comparisons; and defined as explicit or overt 'mapping' across conceptual domains. [1]

The title *Pictures from Italy* is ambiguous, but gives clues as to the kind of travelogue Dickens was writing. At this point in the nineteenth-century, of course, photography was in its infancy- especially of scenery with moveable cameras.(But see footnote 2 below.) Artists, however, did travel extensively on their 'Grand Tours', and their pictures were widely displayed in galleries. Many travellers as amateur artists themselves drew sketches or painted pictures in their journals. (one such journal sold recently for nearly £4000 at Sotheby's.) The title then, in an objective sense, suggests as a 'frame' an apparent analogy with painting, if painting is not entirely objective, of course. Certainly, in Dickens' very first work, a similar artistic frame is evoked in the title of the fictional *Sketches by Boz* (1836). However, Dickens himself in his Introduction to *Pictures from Italy* intriguingly states that 'this book is a series of *faint reflections- mere shadows in the water-* of places to which the imaginations of most people are attracted'(p.573): places then of which people already have mental images. Dickens' purpose appears to be to make these images real to his readers who are unable to see the places for themselves; but also, the imagery used here suggests that the *Pictures*, like the letters home which form the 'trace', will themselves be impressionistic, subjective rather than objective, filtered through his own consciousness, his own focalization as traveller-narrator.

## 2. The role of analogy

As I see it, there are four kinds of analogies at work, each group having different functions and effects, and, most importantly, different degrees of reader-helpfulness. Examples from my first group (Group A), include:

1. 'A house *more* cheerful and habitable *than* the great rooms are, within, *would be difficult to conceive*; and certainly *nothing more* delicious *than* the same without... *could be imagined...*' (p.607)
2. '...And now the sun is going down, in *such* magnificent array of red, and green, and golden light, *as neither pen nor pencil could depict...*' (p.608)
3. '*No* prospect can be *more* diversified and lovely *than* the changing views of the harbour...' (p.596)
4. [The view over the sea] '*affords one of the most fascinating and delightful prospects in the world*' (p.607)
5. '*I never* did hear *such* a discordant din [as the band in the church]'' (p.594)
6. 'The Theatre of Puppets...is *without exception, the drollest* exhibition *I have ever seen in my life*' (p.605)
7. [on first arriving in Genoa:] '*the perfect absence of resemblance* in any dwelling-house, or shop, or wall, or post, or pillar, *to anything one had ever seen before...* perfectly confounded me...' (p.590) (See also Group D below.)

I am sure there is a rhetorical term to cover expressions of indescribability, inexpressibility, etc, as in examples 1 and 2. The use of negatives can be noted (1,2, 3,5), and superlatives (4,6) and comparatives (1,3): rhetorical figures of *superlatio* and *comparatio* perhaps. The artistic image in example 2 can be noted: but despite the possible use of an artistic 'frame' overall, Dickens, perhaps wisely, does not overall stress the persona of a painter. Certainly, these analogies suggest that what he has seen cannot easily be comprehended or described in words, paintings would be better; or that what he has seen is quite different from what he is used to (examples 5,6,7). In appraisal theory terms, the analogies are evaluative (Hunston and Thompson 2000). Nonetheless, as a whole, this group of analogies seem to be the least satisfactory, even satisfying,, since they are of little use to the reader, to enable them to picture Genoa in their own minds (see especially 3 and 4, with the vague or clichéd use of adjectives).

In Group B I would include:

1. 'I fell into a *dismal reverie*...I am conscious of a *feverish and bewildered* vision of saints and virgins' shrines..' (p.590)
2. 'In the course of two months, the *flitting shapes and shadows* of my *dismal entering reverie* gradually resolved themselves into familiar forms and substances...' (p.595)
3. 'It is a *sort of intoxication* to a stranger to walk on, and on, and on,... A *bewildering phantasmagoria*, with all the inconsistency of a *dream*, and all the pain and all the pleasures of an extravagant reality!' (p.597)
4. [The Palazzo Pesciere] '*is more like an enchanted place in and Eastern story than a grave and sober lodging...* That prospect from the hall is *like a vision to me*. I go back to it, *in fancy*, as I have done in calm reality a hundred times a day...in a perfect *dream* of happiness' (p.607)
5. '...fowls and cats had so taken possession of the out-buildings, that *I couldn't help thinking of the fairy tales...*' (p.595)
6. '... an old lady...hailed through one of the little front windows, *like a harlequin...*' (p.591)
7. The Blue Confraternita '*look as if they were Ghoules or Demons*, bearing off the body for themselves...' (p.604)

This group certainly appear more in tune with the subjective imagery of his Introduction cited above. The analogies are highly suggestive, evoking the fantasies of the *Arabian Nights*, the hallucinations of his own later *Edwin Drood*, or images of the Gothic novel [2]. Certainly, in the nineteenth century as in previous centuries, Italy was seen in the popular imagination as a ‘hot-bed of murderous intrigues’ (Caponi-Doherty 1996: 153). Clearly Genoa is meant to appear exotic and dis-orienting; but nevertheless the analogies still do not help readers to form a clear picture in their own minds.

Group C can be seen as quintessentially ‘Dickensian’, part of his stylistic idiolect already established by this date:

1. [The loungers in the apothecaries] ‘you mistake them-as I did one ghostly man in *bottle green*, on day, with a hat *like a stopper- for Horse Medicine...*’ (p.600)
2. [A child is hung up on a hook and] left dangling *like a doll in an English rag-shop* [see also Group D]... that curious little stiff *instrument...* was passed from one to another...*by the handle- like a short poker- it was lying across the font then...*not to be bent on any terms..’ (p.602)
3. The statues look ‘*as if they were afflicted with a cutaneous disorder*’ (p.593)
4. A statue ‘*looked exactly as if it had been covered with sticking-plaster, and afterwards powdered...*’ (p.595)
5. A habitation ‘*looking as if it had grown there, like a fungus..*’ (p.598)
6. Little shops stuck so close ‘*like parasite vermin in the great carcass...*’ (p.598)
7. [The noise the frogs make at night:] ‘*One would think that scores upon scores of women in pattens were going up and down a wet stone pavement without a moment’s cessation...*’ (p.592)

Here the analogies, many characteristically introduced by the ‘signalling devices’ (Goatly 1997) of *like* and *look as if*, reveal a grotesque world-view, the animate transformed as it were into the inanimate, the inanimate into the animate. [3] In this group the striking visual images are helpful to the reader, but in order to re-create the scene in Dickens’ terms. It can be noted how most of them are strongly negative, to evoke what Dickens clearly sees as the squalid and neglected landscape of Genoa.

In both groups B and C the analogies move from the concrete or visible vehicle/ source to the exotic or bizarre, the familiar to the unfamiliar, the ‘given’ to the ‘new’. This one would generally expect in the trajectory of analogy generally, especially in literary language. But consider the following examples, Group D. Again, many of the analogies are negative in their semantic prosody, but it is the process of ‘mapping’ that is to be noted. (To these can be added example 7 from Group A, and example 2 from Group C).

1. ‘... the passages *more squalid and more close than any in St Giles*, or old Paris...’ (p.590)
2. ‘...a most enormous room with a vaulted roof and whitewashed walls; *not unlike a great Methodist chapel...*’ (p.560)
3. ‘...the walls *look like the entrance to Vauxhall Gardens on a sunny day...*’ (p.593)
4. ‘...every inch [of the hall] is elaborately painted, but...*as dirty as a police-station in London*’ (p.597)
5. ‘...small boys ...shake money-boxes before some mysterious little buildings *like rural turnpikes*’ (p.601)
6. ‘The Porto Franco... where goods brought in from foreign countries pay no duty until they are sold and taken out, *as in a bonded warehouse in London*’ (p.599)

7. 'At other times there were clouds and haze enough *to make an Englishman grumble in his own climate...*' (p.597)

In such examples Dickens moves from the concrete to the even more 'familiar'- the world of home, England and London: a process of familiarisation rather than de-familiarisation. So the physical world of Italy and Genoa is mapped on to the physical world of England and London (and the accepted cognitive term 'mapping' nicely echoes its literal sense here!). There is a very explicit example when Dickens writes of his visit to Rome:

8. '... when, after another mile or two, the Eternal City appeared in the distance; *it looked like- I am half afraid to write the word- like LONDON!!..* I swear, that *keenly as I felt the absurdity of the comparison, it was so like London*, at that distance, that if you could have shown it to me, in a glass [telescope], I should have taken it for nothing else...' (p.651)

Dickens is apologising for his analogy here, but there is no need. Given the genre in which he is writing, the travelogue, this kind of example is perfectly understandable and acceptable, from the point of view of both a Jakobsonian *expressive* function and also a *conative* function: that is, in its orientation both to the subjectivity of the narrator-traveller persona on the one hand, and also to the needs of the reader on the other. When we travel it seems perfectly natural to relate the unfamiliar to the familiar. In textworld theory terms, by a principal of minimal departure (Gavins 2006), we constantly compare the new with what we know of at home - in order to locate a common ground, and in order to fully comprehend it. And we constantly say 'X reminds me of Y'. So John Forster, summarising the letters home that Dickens wrote to him in 1844 from Italy, writes:

9. 'The marquis had a splendid house, but Dickens found the grounds so carved into grottoes and fanciful walks *as to remind him of nothing so much as our old white Conduit house...*' (1969 edn: 327)

A celebrated literary prototype for extended mapping of this kind is surely Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a work which is explicitly evoked by Dickens in his description of Bologna:

10. [The official at the ceremony] 'was at least *equal to the Deputy Usher of the Black Rod...I compared him, like Gulliver in Brobdingnag "with the institutions of my own beloved country"*...They would *no more have such a man for a verger in Westminster Abbey than they would let the people in (as they do in Bologna) to see the monuments for nothing...*' (p.619-20)

In Dickens' own case there is the special emotion, chiefly at first in Genoa, that what he sees is negatively compared with the familiar: his expectations in his imagination, as is perfectly reasonable, not matched in reality. He is also dis-oriented (see example 7 in Group A above); and homesick. In his letters home to Forster, where, of course, he is not writing for public consumption, and where the time of seeing and experiencing corresponds more closely with the time of writing, this homesickness is obvious, and London and his home are more favourably viewed. Note the use of comparison-structures, e.g. with *so-as*:

11 a [ The weather at Albaro is so foggy] that ‘I have never yet seen it *so clear as* on a bright, lark-singing day at Broadstairs...’ (1969 edn: 316)

11.b. ‘the sky above me is *familiar* to my sight. Is it *heresy* to say that I have seen its twin brother shining through the window of Jack Straw’s? That down in Devonshire Terrace I have seen a *better* sky?’ (1969 edn: 317)

11.c. ‘If [the fountains] played nectar they wouldn’t please me *half so well as* the West Middlesex waterworks at Devonshire Terrace...’ (1969 edn: 333)

From the reader’s point of view, however, the kind of analogies in Group D above (1-8) work very well. From the mappings of an un-familiar world onto a familiar the reader’s own mental picture can be readily created, and the sights described more easily comprehended: whether the Genoan buildings ( D 1,2, 3, 4,5); industry (6); or the weather ( 7). Again, in his letters to Forster there is a very explicit example of the conative, addressee-oriented frame, as he draws Forster into the familiar London terrain, creates a common ground, both literally and metaphorically:

12. ‘ *Imagine yourself* [i.e. Forster] looking down a street *of Reform Clubs* cramped after the old fashion....’ (1969 edn: 322)

Generally, from this ‘togglng’ in textworld theory terms, between London and Genoa, the actual world of Genoa at the time of both seeing and recollection is blended with the world of Dickens at the time of writing, back in London, to produce in effect a literary creation, a ‘virtual reality’. Here is Genoa, but it is also not Genoa. What is particularly noteworthy about this mapping is that the analogies in Group D are not metaphorical so much as metonymic. Genoa and London obviously do have properties in common: streets, houses and churches, for example, and so they are on the same semantic plane so to speak [4]. Nonetheless, if you put all the different kinds of analogies together, Groups B and C particularly, the world of Genoa is a rich composition of possible worlds and sub-worlds corresponding as much to Dickens’ beliefs, fantasies and wishes, as to actual experience. In Stockwell’s terms (2009) the analogies are a necessary part of the ‘texture’ of the work.

### 3. Further implications

Gentner and Gentner (1983: 91) note generally how analogical comparisons with familiar systems often occur in people’s descriptions of complex systems : I would say ‘unfamiliar’ here; and they also note how these particularly feature in scientific and educational writing. Like travel writing, these genres are also conative in their orientation towards the reader. It has to be said that a stylistics of the discourse of tourism generally has yet to emerge. It would certainly be interesting to explore the different sub-genres of tourist literature, and at different periods, to see if there can be found any patterns of frequency in the kinds of analogies identified above. A more obvious starting – point, of course, would be a comparison of *Pictures from Italy* with Dickens’ own *American Notes* (1842).

### Notes

[1] In this I follow Gentner & Gentner (1993: 448): ‘an analogy is a mapping of knowledge from one domain to the other’. Metaphor could be included in such a definition, but I am not considering metaphor here, only explicitly marked analogies. It is interesting that the *OED*

declares *analogy* ('similitude') as a figure of speech obsolete; but that is in essence how I am treating analogy here.

[2] See also Hollington (1984: 151); Davies (1989: 67-8). It is interesting that *phantasmagoria* in example 3 was first used for a magic lantern show with supernatural optical illusions ( *OED*: 1802f). Dickens was not the first to use the word metaphorically, Landor and Hazlett preceding him in the 1820s. However, another popular form of visual entertainment appears in his subheading *A Rapid Diorama* for his Rome to Naples journey (p.684) and here Dickens does antecede the first metaphorical use noted by the *OED*. A diorama, invented in 1823, showed shifting scenic views with striking light effects. The title, *Pictures from Italy*, can then be seen in a significant sense to anticipate later developments in cinematography. Flint (1998: vii) notes generally how Dickens presents Italy 'like a chaotic magic-lantern show'.

[3] Goatly (1997: 239) notes generally that *as if*- clauses tend to project an unreal world 'which can only be described as very iffy'.

[4] Goatly (1997: 238) notes the existence of *literal* similes as well as *quasi-literal*, where in the first kind the comparisons are more 'between two states of affairs in the same temporal and spatial context'.

## References

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