

The Epithet

What is it?

The definition by Galperin:

- The epithet is a stylistic device based on the interplay of emotive and logical meaning in an attributive word, phrase or even sentence used to characterise an object and pointing out to the reader, and frequently imposing on him, some of the properties or features of the object with the aim of giving an individual perception and evaluation of these features or properties.
- wild wind, heart-burning smile, destructive charms

How is it different from the logical attribute?

- The epithet is markedly subjective and evaluative.
- The logical attribute is purely objective, non-evaluating.

- *green* meadows

- *white* snow

- *round* table

- *blue* skies

- *pale* complexion

- *lofty* mountains

- *encouraging* smile (?)

- *wild* wind

- *loud* ocean

- *remorseless* dash of billows

- *formidable* waves

- *heart-burning* smile

- *destructive* charms

- *glorious* sight

- *encouraging* smile (?)

The classification of epithets

- Epithets may be classified from different standpoints:

1. *semantic*

2. *structural*

SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATION OF EPITHETS

ASSOCIATED

‘dark *forest*’, ‘dreary
midnight’, ‘careful
attention’, ‘unwearying
research’, ‘indefatigable
assiduity’, ‘fantastic
terrors’

UNASSOCIATED

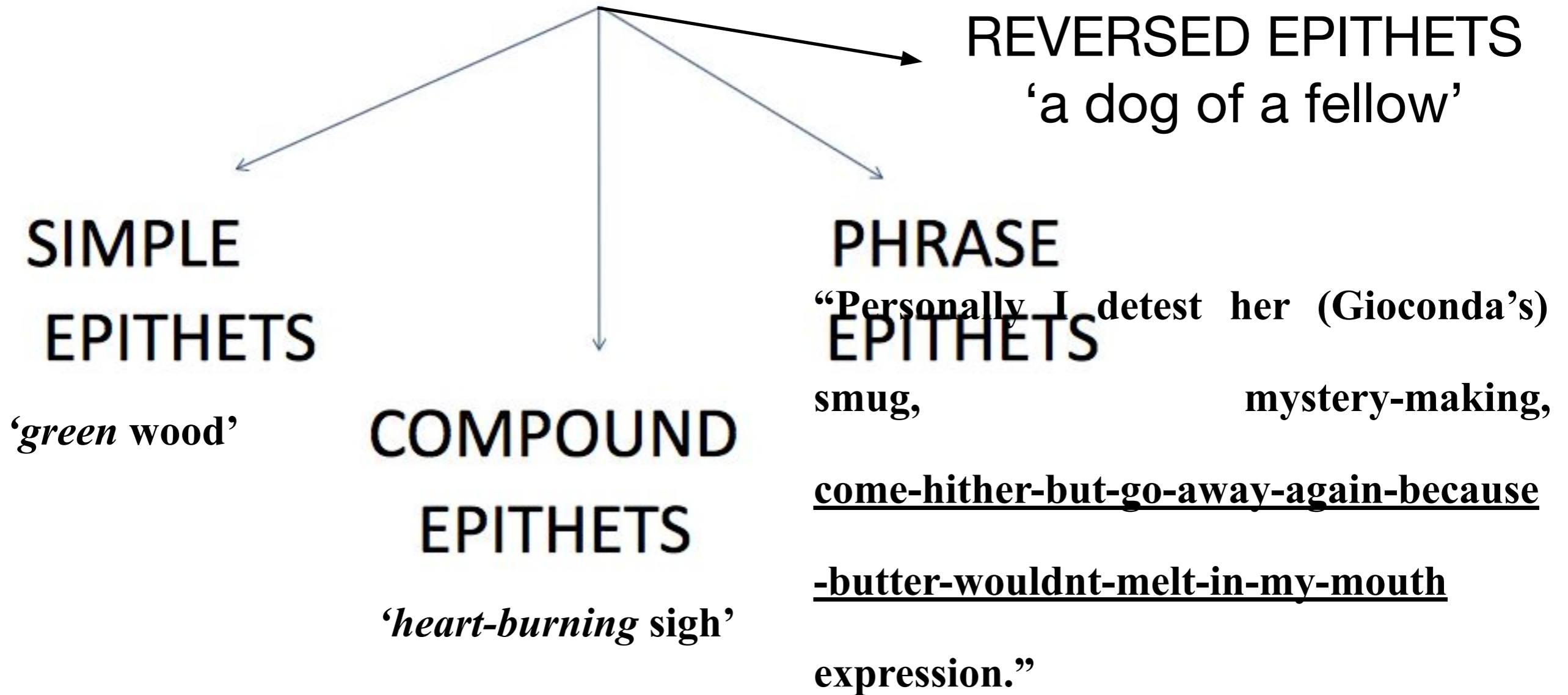
(unexpected)

‘*heart burning* smile’,
‘*bootless* cries’, ‘*sullen*
earth’, ‘*voiceless* sands’

Language epithets and fixed epithets

- There are combinations in which the ties between the attribute and the noun defined are very close, and the whole combination is viewed as a linguistic whole. Thus epithets may be divided into *language epithets* and *speech epithets*.
- ‘*bright* face’, ‘*valuable* connections’, ‘*sweet* smile’, ‘*unearthly* beauty’, ‘*pitch* darkness’, ‘*thirsty* deserts’
- The process of strengthening the connection between the epithet and the noun may sometimes go so far as to build a specific unit which does not lose its poetic flavour. Such epithets are called *fixed*.
- ‘*true* love’, ‘*dark* forest’, ‘*sweet* Sir’

STRUCTURAL CLASSIFICATION OF EPITHETS ACCORDING TO THEIR COMPOSITION (Galperin)



PHRASE EPITHETS

Phrase epithet is a phrase or a whole sentence which performs an attributive function and graphically and syntactically becomes similar to a word.

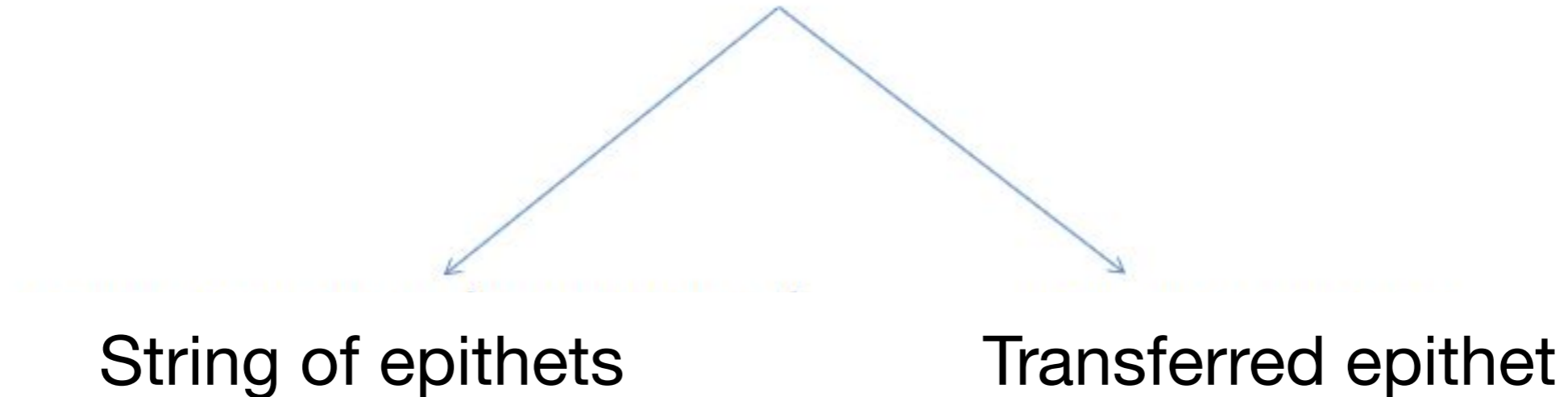
- Phrase epithets are always hyphenated
- Phrase epithets are generally followed by the words ***expression, attitude, air*** and deal with the psychological state of a person.

E.g. There is a sort of '***Oh-what-a-wicked-world-this-is-and-how-I-wish-I-could-do-something-to-make-it-better-and-nobler***' expression about Montmorency that has been known to bring tears into the eyes of pious old ladies and gentlemen (Jerome K. Jerome).

Reversed epithets

- composed of two nouns linked in an of-phrase
- “the *shadow* of a smile”, “a *devil* of a job ”, “...he smiled brightly, neatly, efficiently, a *military abbreviation* of a smile”
- such epithets are metaphorical

Structural classification of epithets according to their *distribution*



String of epithets

- “Such was the background of the wonderful, cruel, enchanting, bewildering, fatal, great city;”
- “a well-matched, fairly-balanced give- and-take couple.”
- The string of epithets gives a many-sided depiction of the object.

Transferred epithet

- Transferred epithets are ordinary logical attributes generally describing the state of a human being, but made to refer to an inanimate object:
- *sick chamber, sleepless pillow, restless pace, breathless eagerness, unbreakfasted morning, merry hours, a disapproving finger, Isabel shrugged an indifferent shoulder*

**Thank you for your
attention!**