

A vital principle of creative writing

What follows are some brief notes about two Classical and Renaissance rhetorical terms that lead into first, mention of a vital principle of creative writing and secondly, some thoughts on how this principle applies to descriptive writing.

For definitions of the rhetorical terms, see Wikipedia: [Metonymy](#), [Synecdoche](#).

Both these figures of speech are used in very specific contexts, although they operate according to a really important principle in creative writing—and indeed in writing in general—which is that often you only need to use one or two words in order to suggest a much bigger picture. For example, ‘In the name of the Crown’ might conjure up an image of a very stern Queen Elizabeth II rebuking a quaking subject. Of course, it may not... But if it did, in its CONTEXT, those six words—and most especially one word ‘Crown’—would be doing the work of thousands: ‘Well, there’s Queen Elizabeth II, who a moment ago looked just like she does on the stamps. But now her brows are furrowed. She has red lipstick on and her lips are drawn back to reveal white teeth. She looks very stern... etc, etc.’

And in descriptive writing, when describing a landscape, for example, you only need to put in a few details—if you choose the ‘right’ ones—in order to stimulate the reader to imagine the scene (as opposed to laboriously detailing every aspect—although of course this can be a technique that a writer might choose, even so).

Frank Egerton 2011