CLASSICAL RHETORIC
for the Modern Student

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feature of style for its own sake; a stylistic device became a virtue only when it contributed to the effectiveness of the passage in which it occurred:

I know that this study of sentence and paragraph length has been beneficial to me, but I would like to consider the choice and arrangement of words used by professional authors. I may be wrong, but to me an author's word choice and word arrangement is more important than the length of his sentences and paragraphs.

I believe, however, that this comparison between my prose and Lucas's reveals simply a difference in style and that no definite decisions can be made about what I should do with my prose style. In order to make such a decision, I would have to compare my vocabulary and sentence structure with Mr. Lucas's when both of us were writing on the same subject-matter.

In general, style depends on a person's individuality and his basic knowledge of English grammar. It doesn't depend on how long the sentences are or how short they are. Mr. Lucas has successfully combined English grammar with his own personal touch to produce a good piece of prose. My own style suffers from the fact that my knowledge of English grammar has not yet developed enough to aid my individuality of expression.

Although this study cannot definitely determine whether my style is good or bad (since there is no entirely good or bad style), it can show the major similarities and differences between my style and a typical modern style.

The style of a professional—in this case, F. L. Lucas—shouldn't be slavishly copied, for it is only by evolving his own style that a student gains enough command over the language to become an effective writer.

So much for this discussion of what to look for when one analyzes prose style. The student will be further aided in developing his own style and in developing a technique for analyzing style by practicing some of the imitation exercises recommended in a later section of this chapter. The student is also urged to read the stylistic analyses of Addison's *Spectator* essay and of President Kennedy's Inaugural Address at the end of this chapter.

Figures of Speech

We come now to a consideration of figures of speech. It is fair enough to regard figures of speech as the "graces of language," as the "dressing of thought," as "embellishments," for indeed they do "decorate" our prose and give it "style," in the couturiére's sense. But it would be a mistake to regard embellishment as the chief or sole function of figures. The classical rhetoricians certainly did not look upon them as decorative devices primarily. Metaphor, according to Aristotle, did give "charm and distinction" to our expression; but even more than that, metaphor was another way to give "clearness" and "liveliness" to the expression of our thoughts. Figures, in his view, provided one of the best ways to strike that happy balance between "the obvious and the obscure," so that our audience could grasp our ideas promptly and thereby be disposed to accept our arguments.

"What, then, can oratorical imagery effect?" Longinus asked. He was even more explicit than Aristotle in pointing out the rhetorical function of figures: "Well, it is able in many ways to infuse vehemence and passion into spoken words, while more particularly when it is combined with the argumnetative passages it not only persuades the hearer but actually makes him its slave."

—On the Sublime, XV, 9.

It was Quintilian who most explicitly related the figures to the *logos, pathos,* and *ethos* of argument. Quintilian looked upon the figures as another means of lending "credibility to our arguments," of "exciting the emotions," and of winning "approval for our characters as pleaders" (*Inst. Orat.*, IX, i). This view of the function of figures of speech is perhaps the most reliable attitude to adopt toward these devices of style. Because figures can render our thoughts vividly concrete, they help us to communicate with our audience clearly and effectively; because they stir emotional responses, they can carry truth, in Wordsworth's phrase, "alive into the heart by passion"; and because they elicit admiration for the eloquence of the speaker or writer, they can exert a powerful ethical appeal.

Sister Miriam Joseph in her book *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* reclassified the more than two hundred figures distinguished by the Tudor rhetoricians according to the four categories: grammar, logos, pathos, and ethos. In doing this, she was able to demonstrate, quite convincingly, that the three "schools" of rhetoric during the Renaissance (the Ramists, the traditionalists, and the figurists) saw the figures as being intimately connected with the topics of invention. Metaphor, for instance, involving comparison of like things, is tied up with the topic of similarity; antithesis,
involving the juxtaposition of opposites, is tied up with the topic of dissimilarity or of contraries. Then there were figures, like apostrophe, that were calculated to work directly on the emotions, and figures, like comparsatio, that were calculated to establish the ethical image of the speaker or writer. In our exposition we shall frequently point out the relationship of the figures either with grammar or with the three modes of persuasive appeal.

The mention of two hundred figures of speech in the previous paragraph may have appalled the student. If pressed, most students could name—even if they could not define or illustrate—a half dozen figures of speech. But where did those other figures come from? and what are they? In their passion for anatomizing and categorizing knowledge, the Humanists of the Renaissance delighted in classifying and sub-classifying the figures. Admittedly, they were being overly subtle in distinguishing such a multitude of figures. The most widely used classical handbook in the Renaissance schools, Rhetorica ad Herennium, required the students to learn only 65 figures. Susenbrotus, in his popular Epitome troporum ac schematum (1540), distinguished 133 figures. But Henry Peacham, in his 1577 edition of The Garden of Eloquence, pushed the number up to 184. Pity the poor Tudor schoolboy who was expected to define and illustrate and to use in his own compositions a goodly number of these figures.

We are not going to plague the student with a long catalogue of figures, but we are going to introduce more figures than he has met with in his previous study of style. If nothing else, the student should become aware, through this expositor, that his language has more figurative resources than he was conscious of. And he may discover that he has been using many of the figures of speech all his life. For men did not begin to use figures of speech only after academicians had classified and defined them; rather, the figures were classified and defined after men had been using them for centuries. Like the principles of grammar, poetics, and rhetoric, the doctrine of the figures was arrived at inductively. Rhetoricians merely gave “names” to the verbal practices of their fellow men.

What do we mean by the term “figures of speech”? We mean the same thing that Quintilian meant when he used the term figura: “any deviation, either in thought or expression, from the ordinary and simple method of speaking, a change analogous to the different positions our bodies assume when we sit down, lie down, or look back…Let the definition of a figure, therefore, be a form of speech artfully varied from common usage (Ergo figura sit arte aliqua novata forma dicendi)”—Inst. Orat., IX, i, 11.

We will use “figures of speech” as the generic term for any artful deviations from the ordinary mode of speaking or writing. But we will divide the figures of speech into two main groups—the schemes and the tropes. A scheme (Greek schéma, form, shape) involves a deviation from the ordinary pattern or arrangement of words. A trope (Greek tropein, to turn) involves a deviation from the ordinary and principal signification of a word.

Both types of figures involve a transference of some kind: a trope, a transference of meaning; a scheme, a transference of order. When Shakespeare’s Mark Antony said, “Brutus is an honorable man,” he was using the trope called irony, because he was “transferring” the ordinary meaning of the word honorable to convey a different meaning to his audience. If Mark Antony had said, “Honorable is the man who gives his life for his country,” he would have been using a species of the scheme hyperbaton, because he would be “transferring” the usual order of words. In a sense, of course, both schemes and tropes involve a change of “meaning,” since both result in effects that are different from the ordinary mode of expression. But for all practical purposes, our distinction is clear enough to enable the student to distinguish between a scheme and a trope.

The terms used to label the various figures appear formidable—strange, polysyllabic words, most of them merely transliterated from the Greek. But technical terms, in any discipline, are always difficult at first sight; they are difficult, however, mainly because they are unfamiliar. Whenever we study a new discipline we have to learn the “names” of things peculiar to that discipline. Inevitably those specialized terms will be puzzling, but they will remain puzzling only until we learn to connect the sign with the concept or thing for which it stands. The word tree is difficult for the child only until he learns to associate the sound or the graphic mark of this word with the thing that it designates. The term prosopopeia will frighten the student at first, but once he gets to the point where he can immediately associate the term with its significance, prosopopeia will be no more frightening to the student than the familiar terms metaphor and simile. We could, as the Renaissance rhetorician George Puttenham tried to do, invent English terms for the various figures, but since they would have to be coined terms, they would not necessarily be any easier to learn than the classical terms. However, wherever a familiar Anglicized term exists for a figure, we will use that term instead of the classical one.

In any case, we must not look upon terminology as an end in itself. Just as we can speak and write our native language without knowing the names of the parts of speech, so we can use and respond to figurative language without knowing the names of the figures. Nomenclature, in any study, is a convenience for purposes of classification and discussion. But an awareness of the various figures of speech can increase our verbal resources, and if we make a conscientious effort to learn the figures of speech, it is likely that we will resort to them more often.
The Schemes

SCHEMES OF WORDS

We shall not dwell very long on schemes of words because they occur frequently in poetry—especially in the poetry of earlier centuries—they rarely occur in prose. The schemes of words (sometimes called orthographical schemes, because they involve changes in the spelling or sound of words) are formed (1) by adding or subtracting a letter or a syllable at the beginning, middle, or end of a word, or (2) by exchanging sounds. Terms like the following are of more concern to the grammarian and the prosodist than to the rhetorician:

prosthesi—adding a syllable in front of word—e.g. beloved for loved
epenethesis—adding a syllable in the middle of word—e.g. vinulating for visiting
proparadiplosis—adding a syllable at the end of word—e.g. climature for climate
aphareseis—subtracting a syllable from the beginning of word—e.g. 'neath for beneath
syncope—subtracting a syllable from the middle of word—e.g. prosperous
apocope—subtracting a syllable from the end of word—e.g. even for evening
metathesis—transposition of letters in a word—e.g. clasp for clasp
antisthenon—change of sound—e.g. wrang for wrong

One can easily see that all of these involve a change in the shape or configuration of words. Poets used to employ such schemes to accommodate the rhyme or the rhythm of a line of verse. And because such changes are associated primarily with poetry, it is customary to regard such altered words as "poetic diction." Perhaps the situation in modern prose where we are most likely to use schemes of words would be the dialogue in a story. If a character in a story habitually clipped syllables from his words or mispronounced certain words, we might try to indicate those speech habits with spelling changes. Readers of Finnegans Wake could supply numerous examples of other uses that James Joyce made of orthographical schemes in his remarkably ingenious prose.

SCHEMES OF CONSTRUCTION

1. Schemes of Balance

Paradigm—similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses.

Examples: He tried to make the law equitable, precise, and comprehensive.

To contain the enemy forces, to reinforce his own depleted resources, to inspirit the sagging morale of his troops, and to re-assess the general strategy of the campaign—these were his objectives when he took command.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from those honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.—Abraham Lincoln

Parallelism is one of the basic principles of grammar and rhetoric. The principle demands that equivalent things be set forth in co-ordinate grammatical structures. So nouns must be yoked with nouns, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, adverb clauses with adverb clauses. When this principle is ignored, not only is the grammar of co-ordination violated, but the rhetoric of coherence is wrecked. Students must be made to realize that violations of parallelism are serious, not only because they impair communication but because they reflect disorderly thinking. Whenever the student sees a co-ordinating conjunction in one of his sentences, he should check to make sure that the elements joined by the conjunction are of the same grammatical kind. Such a check would prevent him from writing sentences like this: "He was jolly, a good talker, and even better as a drinker."

When the parallel elements are similar not only in structure but in length (that is, the same number of words, even the same number of syllables), the scheme is called isocolon. For example: His purpose was to impress the ignorant, to perplex the dubious, and to confound the scrupulous. The addition of symmetry of length to similarity of structure contributes greatly to the rhythm of sentences. Obviously, the student should not strive for isocolon every time he produces parallel structure. Such regularity of rhythm would approach the recurrent beat of verse.
Since parallelism is a device that we resort to when we are specifying or enumerating pairs or series of like things, it is easy to see the intimate relationship between this device of form and the topic of similarity. See the analysis of the rhetorical effect of parallelism in Clark Kerr’s sentence in the previous section.

**Antithesis**—the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, often in parallel structure.

**Examples:** Contempt is the proper punishment of affectation, and detestation the just consequence of hypocrisy.

Many things difficult to design prove easy to perform.

If you are pleased with prognostics of good, you will be terrified likewise with tokens of evil.

If of Dryden’s fire the blaze is brighter, of Pope’s the heat is more regular and constant.

All of these examples are quoted from Dr. Johnson, in whose prose, antithesis is such a pronounced feature that we have come to associate this structural device with his name. But antithesis was a scheme greatly admired by all the rhetoricians.

It was the unknown author of *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* who most clearly pointed up the fact that the opposition in an antithesis can reside either in the words or in the ideas or in both:

An antithesis occurs when both the wording and the sense, or one or other of them, are opposed in a contrast. The following would be an antithesis both of wording and sense: “It is not fair that my opponent should become rich by possessing what belongs to me, while I sacrifice my property and become a mere beggar.” In the following sentence we have a merely verbal antithesis: “Let the rich and prosperous give to the poor and needy”; and an antithesis of sense only in the following: “I tended him when he was sick, but he has been the cause of very great misfortune to me.” Here there is no verbal antithesis, but the two actions are contrasted. The double antithesis (that is, both of sense and of wording) would be the best to use; but the other two kinds are also true antitheses. (From *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, Ch. 26, trans. E. S. Forster.)

Nicely managed, antithesis can produce the effect of aphoristic neatness and can win for the author a reputation for wit. Antithesis is obviously related to the topic of dissimilarity and the topic of contraries. (See the analysis of antithesis in Clark Kerr’s sentence.)

2. Schemes of unusual or inverted word order (hyperbaton)

**Anastrophe**—inversion of the natural or usual word order.

**Examples:** Backward run the sentences, till reels the mind. (From a parody of the style of *Time* Magazine.)

With folly no man is willing to confess himself very intimately acquainted.—Dr. Johnson

People that he had known all his life he didn’t really know.—student theme

Perfectly does anastrophe conform to our definition of a scheme as “an artful deviation from the ordinary pattern or arrangement of words.” Because such deviation surprises expectation, anastrophe can be an effective device for gaining attention. But its chief function is to secure emphasis. It is a commonplace that the beginning and end of a clause are the positions of greatest emphasis. Words placed in those positions draw special attention, and when those initial or terminal words are not normally found in those positions, they receive extraordinary emphasis.

**Parenthesis**—insertion of some verbal unit in a position that interrupts the normal syntactical flow of the sentence.

**Examples:** But wherein any man is bold—I am speaking foolishly—I also am bold. ... Are they ministers of Christ? I—to speak as a fool—I am more.—St. Paul, 2 Cor. 11, 21 and 23

He tried—who could do more?—to restrain the fury of the mob.

The extraordinary number of bills passed during that session (312 of them) did not speak well of the Congressmen’s capacity for deliberation.

The distinguishing mark of parenthesis is that the interpolated member is “cut off” from the syntax of the rest of the sentence. A parenthesis abruptly—and usually briefly—sends the thought off on a tangent. Although the parenthetical matter is not necessary for the grammatical completeness of the sentence, it does have a pronounced rhetorical effect. For a brief moment, we hear the author’s voice, commenting, editorializing, and, for that reason, the sentence gets an emotional charge that it would otherwise not have. Note, for instance, the difference in effect if the parenthetical element in St. Paul’s first sentence is syntactically integrated with the rest of the sentence: “But I am speaking foolishly if I claim that wherein any man is bold, I also am bold.”
Apportion—placing side by side two co-ordinate elements, the second of which serves as an explanation or modification of the first.

Examples: John Morgan, the president of the Sons of the Republic, could not be reached by phone.

A great many second-rate poets, in fact, are second-rate just for this reason, that they have not the sensitiveness and consciousness to perceive that they feel differently from the preceding generation and therefore must use words differently.—T. S. Eliot

Men of this kind—soldiers of fortune, pool-hall habitués, gigolos, beachcombers—expend their talents on trivalties.

Apportion is such a common method of expansion in modern prose that it hardly seems to conform to our definition of a scheme as “an artful deviation from the ordinary patterns of speech.” But if one reflects upon his own experience, he will have to acknowledge that apportional structures seldom occur in impromptu speech. Apportion may not be the exclusive property of written prose, but it certainly occurs most frequently in written prose—in a situation, in other words, where we have time to make a conscious choice of our arrangement of words. So there is something artful about the use of the apportion. And there is something out-of-the-ordinary about the apportion, too. Although the apportion does not disturb the natural flow of the sentence as violently as parenthesisal expressions do (mainly because the apportion is grammatically co-ordinate with the unit that it follows), it does interrupt the flow of the sentence, interrupts the flow to supply some gratuitous information or explanation.

3. Schemes of Omission

Ellipsis—deliberate omission of a word or of words which are readily implied by the context.

Examples: And he to England shall along with you.—Hamlet, III, iii. 4

As with religion, so with education. In colonial New England, education was broad-based, but nevertheless elitist; and in its basic assumptions, intellectualist.—David Marquand, Encounter (March 1964)

When in doubt, play trumps.

Ellipsis can be an artful and arresting means of securing economy of expression. We must see to it, however, that the understood words are grammatically compatible. If we wrote, “The ringleader was hanged, and his accomplices imprisoned,” we would be guilty of a solecism, because the understood was is not grammatically compatible with the plural subject (accomplices) of the second clause. And we produce a “howler” if we say, “While in the fourth grade, my father took me to the zoo.”

Asyndeton—deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses.

Examples: I came, I saw, I conquered.

They may have it in well-doing, they may have it in learning, they may have it even in criticism.—Matthew Arnold

The infantry plodded forward, the tanks rattled into position, the big guns swung their snouts toward the rim of the hills, the planes raked the underbrush with gunfire.

The Tudor rhetoricians had a special name for the omission of conjunctions between single words or phrases. They would have labelled the following as instances of brachylogia:

...and that government of the people, by the people, shall not perish from the earth.—Abraham Lincoln

...that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.—John F. Kennedy

But there seems to be no good reason why we cannot use the single term asyndeton for all these instances of omission of conjunctions. The principal effect of asyndeton is to produce a hurried rhythm in the sentence. Aristotle observed that asyndeton was especially appropriate for the conclusion of a discourse, because there, perhaps more than in any other place in the discourse, we may want to produce the emotional reaction that can be stirred by, among other means, rhythm. And Aristotle concluded his Rhetoric with an instance of asyndeton that is noticeable even in translation: “I have done. You have heard me. The facts are before you. I ask for your judgment.”

The opposite scheme is polysyndeton (deliberate use of many conjunctions). Note how the proliferation of conjunctions in the following quotation slows up the rhythm of the prose and produces an impressively solemn note:

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds and
everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.—Genesis, 1:24-25

Ernest Hemingway uses polysyndeton to create another effect. Note how the repeated and's in the following passage suggest the flow and continuity of experience:

I said, “Who killed him?” and he said, “I don’t know who killed him but he’s dead all right,” and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mago Key and she was all right only she was full of water.—Hemingway, “After the Storm”

Polysyndeton can also be used to produce special emphasis. Note the difference in effect of these two sentences:

This semester I am taking English, history, biology, mathematics, sociology, and physical education.

This semester I am taking English and history and biology and mathematics and sociology and physical education.

4. Schemes of Repetition

ASSONANCE—the repetition of similar vowel sounds, preceded and followed by different consonants, in the stressed syllables of adjacent words.

Example: An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king—
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn—nur'ed from a maddy spring—
——Shelley, “Sonnet: England in 1819”

Assonance, a device of sound, like alliteration, is used mainly in poetry. A prose writer might deliberately use assonance to produce certain onomatopoetic or humorous effects. The danger for the prose writer, however, lies in the careless repetition of similar vowel-sounds, producing awkward jingles like this: “He tries to revise the evidence supplied by his eyes.”

ANAPHEORA—repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive clauses.

Examples: The Lord sitteth above the water floods. The Lord remaineth a King forever. The Lord shall give strength unto his people. The Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.—Psalm 29
We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills.—Winston Churchill
This is the essence—this is the heart—this is the day-to-day stuff of our duty in this Assembly as we see it: to build mightier mansions, to keep strengthening the United Nations.—Adlai E. Stevenson

Whenever anaphora occurs, we can be sure that the author has used it deliberately. Since the repetition of the words helps to establish a marked rhythm in the sequence of clauses, this scheme is usually reserved for those passages where the author wants to produce a strong emotional effect. Note how Reinhold Niebuhr combines anaphora with plays on words to produce this neat aphorism: “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”

EPITREPHONE—repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive clauses.

Examples: Shylock: I’ll have my bond! Speak not against my bond!
I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond!
——Merchant of Venice, III, iii, 3-4
When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child—St. Paul, 1 Cor. 13, 11

After a war that everyone was proud of, we concluded a peace that nobody was proud of.—Walter Bagehot

He's learning fast. Are you earning fast?—Advertisement for Aetna Life Insurance

Epistrophe not only sets up a pronounced rhythm but secures a special emphasis, both by repeating the word and by putting the word in the final position in the sentence.

Epanalepsis—repetition at the end of a clause of the word that occurred at the beginning of the clause.

Example: Blood hath bought blood, and blows have answer'd blows:

Strength match'd with strength, and power confronted power.

—Shakespeare, King John, II, i, 329-30

Epanalepsis is rare in prose, probably because when the emotional situation arises that can make such a scheme appropriate, poetry seems to be the only form that can adequately express the emotion. It would seem perfectly natural for a father to express his grief over the death of a beloved son in this fashion: "He was flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone, blood of my blood." But would the father be speaking prose or poetry? Perhaps the only answer we could give is that it is heightened language of some sort, the kind of language which, despite its appearance of contrivance, springs spontaneously from intense emotion. Repetition, we know, is one of the characteristics of highly emotional language. And in this instance what better way for the father to express the intimacy of the relationship with his son than by the repetition of words at the beginning and end of successive groups of words?

Perhaps the best general advice about the use of epanalepsis—in fact of all those schemes that are appropriate only to extraordinary circumstances—would be, "If you find yourself consciously deciding to use epanalepsis, don't use it." When the time is appropriate, the scheme will present itself unbidden.

Anadiplosis—repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause.

Examples: Labor and care are rewarded with success, success produces confidence, confidence relaxes industry, and negligence ruins the reputation which diligence had raised.—Dr. Johnson, Rambler No. 21

They point out what is perfectly obvious, yet seldom realized: That if you have a lot of things you cannot move about a lot, that furni-

ture requires dusting, dusters require servants, servants require insurance stamps.... It [property] produces men of weight. Men of weight cannot, by definition, move like the lightning from the East unto the West.—E. M. Forster, "My Wood," Abinger Harvest

Climax—arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of increasing importance.

Examples: More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.—St. Paul, Romans, 5, 3-5

Let a man acknowledge obligations to his family, his country, and his God.

In our institutions of higher learning one finds with the passing years more and more departmentalized pedants hiding in the holes of research, seeking to run away from embarrassing questions, afraid of philosophy and scared to death of religion.—Bernard Iddings Bell, "Perennial Adolescence"

Climax can be considered a scheme of repetition only when, as in the first example quoted above, it is a continued anadiplosis involving three or more members. Otherwise, as in the second and third examples, it is simply a scheme which arranges a series in an order of gradually rising importance. This latter variety of climax can be looked upon as a scheme related to the topic of degree, and it is the kind of climax that the student will most often find in modern prose and that he will probably find occasion to use in his own prose.

Antimetabole—repetition of words, in successive clauses, in reverse grammatical order.

Examples: One should eat to live, not live to eat.—Molière, L'Avare

You like it, it likes you.—Advertising slogan for Seven-Up

Mankind must put an end to war—or war will put an end to mankind.—John F. Kennedy, United Nations Speech, 1961

Ask not what America can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.—John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address

All of these examples have the air of the "neatly turned phrase"—the kind of phrasing that figures in most memorable aphorisms. Would the sentence
from President Kennedy's Inaugural Address be so often quoted if it had read something like this: "Do not ask what America can do for you. You would do better to ask whether your country stands in need of your services"? The "magic" has now gone out of the appeal. It would be a profitable exercise for the student to take several of the schemes presented in this section and convert them into ordinary prose. Such an exercise would undoubtedly reveal what the schemes add to the expression of the thought.

Similar to antimetabole is the scheme called chiasmus ("the criss-cross"). Chiasmus reverses the grammatical structures in successive clauses, but unlike antimetabole, does not repeat the words. Example: "I am indisposed to work, but to beg I am ashamed." Both antimetabole and chiasmus can be used to reinforce antithesis.

Polyptoton—repetition of words derived from the same root.

Examples: The Greeks are strong, and skilful to their strength,
Fierce to their skill, and to their fierceness valiant;
—Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, 1, i, 7-8

No man is just who deals unjustly with another man.
He is a man to know because he's known.
In the midst of all this dark, this void, this emptiness, I, more ghostly than a ghost, cry, "Who? Who?" to no answer.—Loren Eiseley, "The Uncompleted Man," Harper's (March 1964)
Their blood bleeds the nation of its sanguine assurance.
Not as a call to battle, though embattled we are.—John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address

Polyptoton is very much akin to those plays on words that we will investigate in the next section on tropes.

The Tropes

Metaphor and Simile

Metaphor—an implied comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common.

Simile—an explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common.

Examples (all from student themes):

He had a posture like a question-mark. (simile)
On the final examination, several students went down in flames.
(metaphor)
Like an arrow, the prosecutor went directly to the point. (simile)
The question of federal aid to parochial schools is a bramble patch.
(metaphor)
Silence settled down over the audience like a block of granite.
(simile)
Birmingham lighted a runaway fuse, and as fast as the headlines could record them, demonstrations exploded all over the country.
(metaphor)

We shall treat of metaphor and simile together because they are so much alike. The difference between metaphor and simile lies mainly in the manner of expressing the comparison. Whereas metaphor says, "David was a lion in battle," simile says, "David was like a lion in battle." Both of these tropes are related to the topic of similarity, for although the comparison is made between two things of unlike nature (David and lion), there is some respect in which they are similar (e.g. they are courageous, or they fight ferociously, or they are unconquerable in a fight). The thing with which the first thing is compared is to be understood in some "transferred sense": David is not literally a lion, but he is a lion in some "other sense."

An extended or continued metaphor is known as an allegory. We see one of these sustained metaphors in The Battle of the Books, where Jonathan Swift compares the classical writers, not to the spider, which spins its web out of its own entrails, but to the far-ranging bee:

As for us the ancients, we are content with the bee to pretend to nothing of our own, beyond our wings and our voices, that is to say, our flights and our language. For the rest, whatever we have got has been by infinite labor and search, and ranging through every corner of nature; the difference is that instead of dirt and poison, we have chosen to fill our hives with honey and wax, thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light.

Closely allied to this form of extended metaphor is parable, an anecdotal narrative designed to teach a moral lesson. The most famous examples of parable are those found in the New Testament. In the parable of the sower of seeds, for instance, our interest is not so much in the tale of a man who went out to sow some seeds as in what each detail of the anecdote "stands
for,” in what the details “mean.” Whenever the disciples were puzzled about what a particular parable meant, they asked Christ to interpret it for them.

And while we are talking about these analogical tropes, we should warn the student to be on his guard against the “mixed metaphor,” which results when he loses sight of the terms of his comparison. When Joseph Addison said, “There is not a single view of human nature which is not sufficient to extinguish the seeds of pride,” it is obvious that he is mixing two different metaphors. We could say “to extinguish the flames of pride” or “to water the seeds of pride,” but we cannot mix the notion of extinguishing with that of seeds. The rhetoricians sometimes called such “wrenching of words” catachresis.

Synecdoche—a figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole.

Examples:

- genus substituted for the species:
  - vessel for ship, weapon for sword, creature for man, arms for rifles, vehicle for bicycle

- species substituted for the genus:
  - bread for food, cutthroat for assassin

- part substituted for the whole:
  - sail for ship, hands for helpers, roofs for houses

- matter for what is made from it:
  - silver for money, canvas for sail, steel for sword

In general, we have an instance of synecdoche when the part or genus or adjourn that is mentioned suggests something else. It is an oblique manner of speaking. All of the following illustrate this trope: “Give us this day our daily bread.” “All hands were summoned to the quarter-deck.” “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.” “They braved the waves to protect their fatherland.” “Brandish your steel, men.” “Are there no roofs in this town that will harbor an honorable man?” “It is pleasing to contemplate a manufacture rising gradually from its first mean state by the successive labors of innumerable minds.”—Johnson, Rambler No. 9. “The door closed upon the extempore surgeon and midwife, and Roaring Camp sat down outside, smoked its pipe, and awaited the issue.”—Bret Harte, “The Luck of Roaring Camp.”

Metonymy—substitution of some attributive or suggestive word for what is actually meant.

Examples: crown for royalty, mitre for bishop, wealth for rich people, brass for military officers, bottle for wine, pen for writers

Metonymy and synecdoche are so close to being the same trope that George Campbell, the eighteenth-century rhetorician, wondered whether we should make any great effort to distinguish them. Those rhetoricians who did make the effort to discriminate these tropes would label the following as examples of metonymy:

He slinks out of the way of the humblest petticoat.—G. B. Shaw
As if the kitchen and the nursery were less important than the office in the city.—G. B. Shaw
“Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light lest the darkness overtake you.”—John 13, 34-5
He addressed his remarks to the chair.
He was addicted to the bottle.
Yesterday I sold a Rembrandt.
If the nearness of our last necessity brought a nearer conformity into it, there were happiness in hoary hairs and no calamity in half senses.—Sir Thomas Browne
In Europe, we gave the cold shoulder to De Gaulle, and now he gives the warm hand to Mao Tse-tung.—Richard Nixon

Puns—generic name for those figures which make a play on words.

(1) Antanaclasis—repetition of a word in two different senses.

- Learn a craft so that when you grow older you will not have to earn your living by craft.
- Never serve the coffee without the cream—Harvey’s Bristol Cream (advertising slogan)

(2) Paronomasia—use of words alike in sound but different in meaning.

- It was a foul act to steal my foul.
- RCA—A sound tradition (advertisement for a stereo set).

(3) Syllepsis—use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words, which it modifies or governs.

- He lost his hat and his temper.
- Here thou, great Anna, whom three realms obey
  - Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes sea.—Alexander Pope
The figure of *zeugma* is somewhat like *syllepsis*, but whereas in *syllepsis* the single word is grammatically and idiomatically compatible with both of the other words that it governs, in a *zeugma* the single word does not fit grammatically or idiomatically with one member of the pair. If we say, "*Jane has murdered* her father, and may you too" or "*He maintained a flourishing* business and racehorse," we would be producing an instance of *zeugma*, because in both sentences the underlined word is either grammatically or idiomatically incongruous with one member (in these examples, the second member) of the pair it governs. Those two lines from Pope's *Rape of the Lock* which are often classified as *zeugma*—"*Or stain her honour, or her new brocade*" and "*Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball*"—would, according to our definition, be examples of *syllepsis*. *Syllepsis* is the only one of these two figures which can be considered a form of *pun*. *Zeugma*, if skillfully managed, could be impressive as a display of wit, but often enough, *zeugma* is nothing more than a faulty use of the scheme of ellipsis.

**Anthimeria**—the substitution of one part of speech for another.

**Examples:** *I'll unhair thy head.*—Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, v, 64

A mile before his tent fall down, and *knee*
The way into her mercy.—Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, V, i, 5

The thunder would not *peace* at my bidding.—Shakespeare, *King Lear*, IV, vi, 103

Dozens of other examples of *anthimeria* could be quoted from Shakespeare’s plays. If a word was not available for what he wanted to express, Shakespeare either coined a word or used an old word in a new way. Today’s writer must use *anthimeria* seldom and with great discretion unless he is truly a master of the existing English language. On the other hand, an apt creation can be pungent, evocative, witty, or memorable. English today is a rich, flexible language, because words have been borrowed, changed, and created. Think of all the ways in which a word like *smoke* has been used since it first came into the language:

*The smoke rose from the chimney.*
The chimney smokes.
*He smoked the ham.*
*He smokes.*
*He asked for a smoke.*
*He objected to the smoke nuisance.*
*He noticed the smoky atmosphere.*

He tried smoking on the sly.
*He smoked out the thief.*
*His dreams went up in smoke.*
The Ferrari smoked along the wet track.

Someday someone will say, if it hasn’t been said already, "He looked at her smokily."

**Periphrasis** (antonomasia)—substitution of a descriptive word or phrase for a proper name or of a proper name for a quality associated with the name.

**Examples:** The *Splendid Splinter* hit two more *round-trippers* today.
The Negro does not escape *Jim Crow* when he moves into a higher-income bracket.

She may not have been a *Penelope*, but she was not as unfaithful as the gossips made her out to be.

When his swagger is exhausted, he drags into erotic poetry or sentimental uxoriousness. And the *Teutonic* *King Arthur* posing at *Guinevere* becomes *Don Quixote* groveling before *Dulcinea.*—G. B. Shaw

The frequency with which we meet this trope, even in modern prose, is evidence of the urge in man to express familiar ideas in uncommon ways. Circumlocutions and tags can become tiresome clichés (as they often do on the sports page), but when they display a fresh, decorous inventiveness, they can add grace to our writing. It is the trite or overly ingenious oblique expression that wearies the reader.

**Personification** (prosopoeia)—investing abstractions or inanimate objects with human qualities or abilities.

**Examples:** The ground thirsts for rain.
The very stones cry out for revenge.

*Can Honor’s voice provoke the silent dust,*
*Or Flatt’ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?*—Thomas Gray

Personification is such a familiar figure that there is no need to multiply examples of it. This is one of the figures that should be reserved for passages designed to stir the emotions. Another emotional figure, closely allied to personification, is apostrophe (addressing an absent person or a personified abstraction). Here is an example of apostrophe from Sir Walter Raleigh’s *History of the World*:
O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persevered; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world has flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised. Thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all with these two narrow words, Hic jacet.

Hyperbole—the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect.

Examples: His eloquence would split rocks.

It's really ironical...I have gray hair. I really do. The one side of my head—the right side—is full of millions of gray hairs.—Holden Caulfield in Catcher in the Rye

My left leg weighs three tons. It is embalmed in spices like a mummy. I can’t move. I haven’t moved for five thousand years. I’m of the time of Pharaoh.—Thomas Bailey Aldrich, “Marjorie Daw”

Hyperbole is so steadily drenched into our ears that most of us have ceased to think of it as a figure of speech. Advertisers and teenagers can hardly talk without using superlatives. Perhaps we would not be so much amused by the Oriental greeting, “We welcome you, most honorable sir, to our miserable abode;” if we stopped to consider how exaggerated many of our forms of greeting, address, and compliment are.

Hyperbole can be a serviceable figure of speech if we learn to use it with restraint and for a calculated effect. Under the stress of emotion, it will slip out naturally and will then seem appropriate. If we can learn to invent fresh hyperboles, we will be able to produce the right note of emphasis (as in the first example above) or humor (as in the quotation from Aldrich).

Being related to the topic of degree, hyperbole is like the figure called auxesis (magnifying the importance or gravity of something by referring to it with a disproportionate name). So a lawyer will try to impress a jury by referring to a scratch on the arm as “a wound” or to pilfering from the petty-cash box as “embezzlement.” We can accept Mark Antony’s reference to the wound that Brutus inflicted on Caesar as “the most unkindest cut of all,” but the occasion seemed not to warrant Senator Joseph McCarthy’s classic remark, “That’s the most unheard of thing I ever heard of.”

Litterae—deliberate use of understatement, not to deceive someone but to enhance the impressiveness of what we say.

Examples: It was a not unhappy crowd that greeted the team at the airport.

Scaliger’s influence in France was not inconsiderable during the sixteenth century.—Joel E. Spingarn, Literary Criticism in the Renaissance

Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her appearance for the worse.—Jonathan Swift, A Tale of a Tub

I am a citizen of no mean city.—St. Paul

Litotes is a form of meiosis (a lessening). The same lawyer whom we saw in the previous section using auxesis might represent another of his clients by referring to a case of vandalism as “boyish highjinks.” A rose by any other name will smell as sweet, but a crime, if referred to by a name that is not too patently disproportionate, may lose some of its heinousness.

Rhetorical Question (ecreema)—asking a question, not for the purpose of eliciting an answer but for the purpose of asserting or denying something obliquely.

Examples: What! Gentlemen, was I not to foresee, or foreseeing was I not to endeavor to save you from all these multiplied mischiefs and disgraces...Was I an Irishman on that day that I boldly withstood our pride? or on the day that I hung down my head and wept in shame and silence over the humiliation of Great Britain? I became unpopular in England for the one, and in Ireland for the other. What then? What obligation lay on me to be popular?—Edmund Burke, Speech in the Electors of Bristol

Wasn’t the cult of James a revealing symbol and symbol of an age and society which wanted to dwell like him in some false world of false art and false culture?—Maxwell Geismar, Henry James and His Cult

The rhetorical question is a common device in impassioned speeches, but it can be used too in written prose. It can be an effective persuasive device, subtly influencing the kind of response one wants to get from an audience. The manner in which the question is phrased can determine either a negative or an affirmative response. If we say, “Was this an act of heroism?” the audience will respond, in the proper context, with a negative answer. By inducing the audience to make the appropriate response, the rhetorical question can often be more effective as a persuasive device than a direct assertion would be.

Irony—use of a word in such a way as to convey a meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the word.

Examples: For Brutus is an honourable man;

So are they all, all honourable men.—Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, III, ii, 88-9
It is again objected, as a very absurd, ridiculous custom that a set of men should be suffered, much less employed and hired, to bawl one day in seven against the lawfulness of those methods most in use toward the pursuit of greatness, riches, and pleasure, which are the constant practice of all men alive on the other six. But this objection is, I think, a little unworthy of so refined an age as ours.—Swift, *Argument Against the Abolishing of Christianity*

As a trope which quite definitely conveys a “transferred meaning,” irony is related to the topic of contraries or the topic of contradiction. A highly sophisticated device, irony must be used with great caution. If one misjudges the intelligence of his audience, he may find that his audience is taking his words in their ostensible sense rather than in the intended opposite sense.

The Tudor rhetoricians had a special name for the kind of irony in which one proposed to pass over some matter, yet managed subtly to reveal the matter anyway. They called this kind of irony *paralipsis*. A notable example of paralipsis is found in Mark Antony’s famous “Friends, Romans, countrymen” speech in *Julius Caesar*:

Let but the commons hear this testament,
Which (pardon me) I do not mean to read,
And they would go and kiss dead Caesar’s wounds...
Have patience, gentle friends; I must not read it.
It is not meet you know how Caesar lov’d you....
’Tis good you know not that you are his heirs.

(III, ii, 136-51)

A look at the entire speech will show how Antony, despite his disclaimers, managed to let the mob know what was in Caesar’s last will.

**Onomatopoeia**—use of words whose sound echoes the sense.

*Examples:* “Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense:
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
When Ajax strives some rock’s vast weight to throw,
The line too labors, and the words move slow;
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o’er the unbending corn, and skims along the main.


*Over the cobbles he dattered and clashed in the dark innyard.—Alfred Noyes, “The Highwayman”*

The spray was hissing hot, and a huge jet of water burst up from its midst.

In the passage quoted above from Pope, some of the onomatopoetic effects are produced by the rhythm of the lines as well as by the sounds of words. Since onomatopoeia seeks to match sound with sense, it is easy to see why this figure was commonly associated with the topic of similarity. Onomatopoeia will be used much less frequently in prose than in poetry, yet it still has its appropriate uses in prose. Wherever sound-effects can be used to set the emotional or ethical tone of a passage, onomatopoeia can make a contribution. In seeking to discredit a person or an act, we could reinforce the effect of pejorative diction with cacophony. In a phrase like “a dastardly episode,” we reveal our attitude toward the event not only by the unpleasant connotations of the word *dastardly* but also by the harsh sound of the word.

**Oxymoron**—the yoking of two terms which are ordinarily contradictory.

*Examples:* expressions like *sweet pain*, *cheerful pessimist*, *conspicuous by his absence*, *cruel kindness*, *thunderous silence*, *luxurious poverty*, *abject arrogance*, *make haste slowly*.

By thus combining contradictories, the writer produces a startling effect, and he may, if his oxymorons are fresh and apt, win for himself a reputation for wit. There is displayed in this figure, as in most metaphorical language, what Aristotle considered a special mark of genius: the ability to see similarities. Here are some examples of oxymoron:

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral.
Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”

But that he may not be thought to conceive nothing but things inconceivable, he has at last thought on a way by which human sufferings may produce good effect.—Dr. Johnson, Review of a treatise by Soame Jenyns

Much as he had accomplished, she could not observe that his most splendid successes were almost invariably failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed.—Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Birthmark”

As an evolutionist, I never cease to be astounded by the past.—Loren Eiseley, “The Uncompleted Man,” *Harper’s* (March 1964)
Concluding Remarks on the Figures of Speech

A knowledge of the figures that have been presented in this chapter will not ensure that the student will be able to invent his own figures or that when he uses figures he will use them aptly and efficaciously. The benefit from such an investigation is rather that having been made aware of the various schemes and tropes the student may make a conscious effort to use figures when he sees that they will suit his purpose. In acquiring any skill, we must at first do consciously what experts do automatically; or, as Dr. Johnson said, "What we hope ever to do with ease, we must learn first to do with diligence." And during this period of apprenticeship, we can expect to do awkwardly what experts do smoothly. With practice, however, we will arrive at that happy state of naturalness that Longinus spoke of in On the Sublime:

Wherefore a figure is at its best when the very fact that it is a figure escapes attention. . . . For art is perfect when it seems to be nature, and nature hits the mark when she contains art hidden within her.

Imitation

Up to this point we have been dealing with the precepts of style. Now we will move on to the second of the ways in which one learns to write or to improve his writing—imitation. Classical rhetoric books are filled with testimonies about the value of imitation for the refinement of the many skills involved in effective speaking or writing. Style is, after all, the most imitable of the skills that co-operate to produce effective discourse.

Rhetoricians recommended a variety of exercises to promote conscious imitation. Roman schoolboys, for example, were regularly set the task of translating Greek passages into Latin and vice versa. In some of the Renaissance schools in England, schoolboys worked back and forth between Greek and Latin and English. Schoolmasters—the better ones anyway—were aware that grammatical differences among these three languages necessitated certain stylistic adjustments in the translation from one language to another. Despite these differences, however, students did learn from this exercise many valuable lessons about sentence structure.

Another exercise imposed on schoolboys was the practice of paraphrasing poetry into prose. Here again many adjustments in style had to be made. Besides teaching students the salient differences between the poetic medium and the prose medium, this exercise made students pay close attention to the potentialities of precise, concrete diction, of emphatic disposition of words, and of figures of speech. Even today there are those who maintain that the best way to improve one's prose style is to study or write poetry.

Another common practice was to set the students the task of saying something in a variety of ways. This process usually started out with a model sentence, which had to be converted into a variety of forms while retaining the basic thought of the original. Erasmus, for instance, in Chapter 33 of his widely-used little book, De duplici copia verborum ac rerum, showed the students 150 ways of phrasing the Latin sentence, Tuae litterae me magis apparens (Your letter has delighted me very much). This variety was achieved partly by the choice of different words, partly by different collocations of words. Here is a sampling of Erasmus's reworkings:

- Your epistle has cheered me greatly.
- Your note has been the occasion of unusual pleasure for me.
- When your letter came, I was seized with an extraordinary pleasure.
- What you wrote to me was most delightful.
- On reading your letter, I was filled with joy.
- Your letter provided me with no little pleasure.

Obviously, not all of the 150 sentences were equally satisfactory or appropriate; in fact, some of them were monstrosities. But by artificially experimenting with various forms, the student becomes aware of the flexibility of the language in which he is working and learns to extend his own range. Ultimately he learns that although there is a variety of ways of saying something, there is a "best way" for his particular subject matter, occasion, or audience. What was "best" for one occasion or audience, he discovers, is not "best" for another occasion or audience.

This text will give the student the opportunity to practice two kinds of imitation—copying passages of prose and imitating various sentence patterns. Before we get into those exercises, we will present the testimony of some famous writers about how they learned to write. The student will see as he reads these testimonies how basic imitation is to the formation of style.

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**Ben Jonson**

For a man to write well, there are required three necessaries—to read the best authors, observe the best speakers, and much exercise of his own style. In style, to consider what ought to be written, and after what manner, he

*From Timber, or Discoveries, 1640.*