

A much-discussed topic, related to the question of an author's assertions and truth claims, is that of the role of the beliefs of the reader. The problem raised is the extent to which a reader's moral, religious, and social convictions, as they coincide with or diverge from those explicitly or implicitly put forth in a work, determine the interpretation, imaginative acceptability, and evaluation of that work by the reader. For the history and discussions of this problem in literary criticism, see William Joseph Rooney, *The Problem of "Poetry and Belief" in Contemporary Criticism* (1949); M. H. Abrams, editor and contributor, *Literature and Belief* (1957); Walter Benn Michaels, "Saving the Text: Reference and Belief," *Modern Language Notes*, 93 (1978).

A useful review of theories concerning the relevance of the criterion of truth to fiction is Monroe C. Beardsley's *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958), pp. 409-19. For a defense of the claim for propositional truth in poetry see Gerald Graff, *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (1970), Chap. 6.

Figurative Language is a departure from what speakers of a particular language apprehend to be the standard meaning of words, or the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. Such figures were long described as primarily "ornaments" of language, but they are integral to the functioning of language, and in fact indispensable not only to poetry, but to all modes of discourse.

Since classical times—the fullest and most influential treatment is the Roman Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* (first century), Books VIII and IX—figurative language has often been divided into two classes: (1) "Figures of thought," or tropes (meaning "turns," "conversions"), in which words or phrases are used in a way that effects a conspicuous change in what we take to be their standard meaning. The standard meaning, as opposed to its tropic meaning, is called the **literal meaning**. (For a philosophical analysis of standard, or literal, meaning, see John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 1979, Chap. 5, and "The Background of Meaning," in *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*, ed. John R. Searle, 1980.) (2) "Figures of speech," or "rhetorical figures," or schemes (from the Greek word for "form"), in which the departure from standard usage is not, primarily, in the meaning but in the order of the words. This distinction is not a sharp one, nor do all critics agree in its application. For convenience, however, the most common tropes are treated here, and the most common figures of speech are collected in the article *rhetorical figures*. A number of other deviations from the standard significance or order of words, treated in individual articles of the *Glossary* but often classified as tropes, are listed at the end of this essay.

In a **simile**, a comparison between two distinctly different things is indicated by the word "like" or "as." A simple example is Burns's "O my love's like a red, red rose." The following simile from Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" differs from Burns's, in that it specifies the features in which custom is similar to frost ("heavy") and to life ("deep"):

And custom lie upon thee with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.

See also *epic similes*.

In a **metaphor**, a word or expression which in literal usage denotes one kind of thing or action is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing or action, without asserting a comparison. For example, if Burns had said "O my love is a red, red rose" he would have uttered, technically speaking, a metaphor instead of a simile. Here is a more complex metaphor, from the contemporary poet Stephen Spender:

Eye, gazelle, delicate wanderer,
Drinker of horizon's fluid line.*

For the distinction between metaphor and symbol, see *symbol*.

It should be noted that in these examples we can distinguish two elements, the metaphorical term, and its metaphorical signification or subject. In a widely adopted usage, I. A. Richards introduced the name **tenor** for the subject that the metaphor is applied to ("my love" in the altered line from Burns, and "eye" in Spender's lines), and the name **vehicle** for the metaphorical term itself ("rose" in Burns, and the three words "gazelle," "wanderer," and "drinker" in Spender). In an **implicit metaphor**, the tenor is not itself specified, but only implied; thus, if one were to say, in commenting about a death, "That reed was too frail to survive the storm of its sorrows," the situational and verbal context of the term "reed" indicates that it is the vehicle for an unspecified tenor, a human being, while "storm" is the vehicle for an aspect of a specified tenor, "sorrows." Those aspects, properties, or associations of a vehicle which, in a given context, apply to a tenor (specified or implicit) are called by Richards the **grounds** of a metaphor. (See I. A. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1936, Chaps. 5-6.)

All the metaphoric terms, or vehicles, cited so far have been nouns, but other parts of speech may also be used metaphorically. The metaphoric use of a verb occurs in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, V. i. 54, "How sweet the moonlight *sleeps* upon this bank"; and the metaphoric use of an adjective occurs in Andrew Marvell's "The Garden" (1681):

Annihilating all that's made
To a *green* thought in a green shade.

Theories or explanations of metaphor fall roughly into two large classes. The most common, introduced by Aristotle in the fourth century B.C., maintains that a metaphor involves an implicit comparison or similarity between a literal object and a metaphoric object; in this view, a metaphor is an elliptical

*From "Not palaces, an era's crown." Reprinted from *Collected Poems, 1928-1953*, by Stephen Spender, by permission of Random House, Inc., and Faber and Faber Ltd.

form of simile. I. A. Richards proposed in 1936 the alternative view that the meaning of a metaphor is the product of an "interaction" between the meanings of the vehicle and the tenor of a metaphor. In an influential essay, the thesis that a metaphor involves an interaction between elements that involve not only individual words, but fields of associations, has been refined and expanded by the philosopher Max Black. Recently John Searle has rejected both the comparison and interaction views as inadequate, on the grounds that, at best, they serve to explain, and that only in part, how some metaphors get to be produced and to be understood. Searle, in consonance with his overall *speech act theory*, proposes that to explain metaphor, we must distinguish between "word, or sentence-meaning" (the literal meaning of the spoken or written expression) and "utterance meaning" (the metaphorical meaning that a speaker or writer uses the literal word or sentence to express). He goes on to present a set of principles, shared by the speaker and interpreter, to explain how we are able both to produce and to understand metaphorical utterances, as well as to clarify the variety of the relations that may obtain between a literal sentence meaning and the metaphorical utterance meaning of diverse figurative expressions. (For Black and Searle, see the list of readings below.)

A **mixed metaphor** combines two or more diverse metaphoric vehicles. When used inadvertently, without sensitivity to the possible incongruity of the vehicles, the effect can be ludicrous: "Girding up his loins, the chairman plowed through the mountainous agenda." Densely figurative poets such as Shakespeare, however, often mix metaphors in a functional way. Examples are Hamlet's expression of his troubled mind in his *soliloquy* (III. i. 59-60), "to take arms against a sea of troubles,/And by opposing end them," and the involvement of metaphor within metaphor in Shakespeare's Sonnet 65:

O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wrackful siege of battering days?

A **dead metaphor** is one which, like "the leg of a table" or "the heart of the matter," has become so common that we have ceased to be aware of the discrepancy between vehicle and tenor. A dead metaphor, however, is only moribund, and can readily be brought back to life. Someone asked Groucho Marx, "Are you a man or a mouse?" He answered, "Throw me a piece of cheese and you'll find out." The history of language shows that most words that we now take to be literal were, in the distant past, metaphors.

Some tropes, sometimes classified as diverse species of metaphor, are more frequently given names of their own:

In **metonymy** (Greek for "a change of name"), the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it has become closely associated. Thus "the crown" or "the scepter" can stand for a king and "the turf" for horse-racing; "Milton" can signify the writings of Milton ("I have read all of Milton"); and typical attire can signify the male and female sexes: "doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat" (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II. iv. 6). (For the influential distinction by the linguist Roman Jakobson between the meta-

phoric, or "vertical," and the metonymic, or "horizontal," dimension and its application to many aspects of language, see under *linguistics in literary criticism*.)

In *synecdoche* (Greek for "taking together"), a part of something is used to signify the whole, or (more rarely) the whole is used to signify a part. We use the term "ten *hands*" for ten workmen, and Milton refers to the corrupt clergy in "Lycidas" as "blind *mouths*."

Another figure related to metaphor is *personification*, or in the Greek term, *prosopopeia*, in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings (compare *pathetic fallacy*). Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost* (IX, 1002-3), as Adam bit into the fatal apple,

Sky lowered, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal sin.

The second stanza of Keats's "To Autumn" finely personifies the season, autumn, as a woman carrying on the rural chores of that time of year. The personification of abstract terms was standard in eighteenth-century *poetic diction*, where it sometimes became stereotyped. Coleridge cited an eighteenth-century ode celebrating the invention of inoculation against smallpox which began with this *apostrophe* to the personified subject of the poem:

Inoculation! heavenly Maid, descend!

See Steven Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime* (1986).

A *kenning* is a descriptive phrase used in place of the ordinary name for a thing in *Beowulf* and other Old English poems; it is a type of *periphrasis* often used as a stereotyped expression in the highly formulaic poetry of the various old Germanic tongues. Some kennings are instances of *metonymy* ("the whale road" for the sea, and "the ring-giver" for a king); others of *synecdoche* ("the ringed prow" for a ship); still others describe salient or picturesque features of the object identified ("foamy-necked floater" for a ship under sail, "storm of swords" for a battle).

Other deviations from the standard use of words, sometimes classified as tropes, are treated elsewhere in this book: *aporia*, *conceit*, *epic similes*, *hyperbole*, *irony*, *litotes*, *paradox*, *periphrasis*, *pun*, *understatement*. In recent decades, especially in the *New Criticism*, *Russian formalism*, *deconstruction*, and Harold Bloom's theory of the *anxiety of influence*, there has been a strong interest in the nature and function of figurative language, which was once thought to be largely the province of rhetorical classifiers. Metaphor above all has become a focus of attention, by professional philosophers as well as by linguists and literary critics.

A clear summary of the standard classification of figures is Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (rev., 1971). Sister Miriam Joseph's *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (1947) treats the conventional analysis of figures in the Renaissance. René Wellek and Austin Warren, in

Theory of Literature (rev., 1970), summarize, with bibliography, diverse treatments of figurative language; and Jonathan Culler, in *Structuralist Poetics* (1975) and *The Pursuit of Signs* (1981), discusses more recent developments. Influential philosophical analyses of metaphor, discussed above, are Max Black, "Metaphor," in *Models and Metaphor* (1962), and "More About Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Edward Ortney (1979); John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (1979), Chap. 4, "Metaphor"; see also Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (1977); and Mark Johnson, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor* (1981). Sheldon Sacks, ed., *On Metaphor* (1979), includes recent essays by Black, Ricoeur, and other philosophers, as well as by literary critics. On the role of radical metaphors in philosophical systems, see Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (1942); and on constitutive metaphors in theories of criticism, M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953). A comprehensive bibliography of discussions of this trope up to the time of its publication is Warren A. Shibles, *Metaphor: An Annotated Bibliography and History* (1971).

Folklore, since the mid-nineteenth century, has been the collective name applied to verbal materials and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or at least primarily, by word of mouth and by example, rather than in written form. Folklore developed and continues to flourish most in communities where few if any people can read or write. It includes, among other things, legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, and nursery rhymes; pseudoscientific lore about the weather, plants, and animals; customary activities at births, marriages, and deaths; and traditional dances and forms of drama which are performed on holidays or at communal gatherings. Elements of folklore have at all times entered into sophisticated written literature. For example, the choice among the three caskets in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (II. ix) and the superstition about a maiden's dream which is central to Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* (1820) are both derived from folklore.

The following forms of folklore have been of special importance for written literature:

Folk drama originated in primitive rites of song and dance, especially in connection with agricultural activities, which centered on vegetational deities and goddesses of fertility. Some scholars maintain that Greek *tragedy* developed from such rites celebrating the life, death, and rebirth of the vegetational god Dionysus. Folk dramas survive in England in such forms as the St. George play and the **mummers' play** (a "mummer" is a masked actor). Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (Book II, Chap. 5) describes the performance of a mummers' play, and a form of this drama is still performed in America in the Kentucky mountains. See Edmund K. Chambers, *The English Folk-Play* (1933).

Folk songs include love songs, Christmas carols, work songs, sea chanties, religious songs, drinking songs, children's game-songs, and many other types of lyric, in addition to the narrative song, or traditional *ballad*. All forms of folk song have been assiduously collected since the late eighteenth century, and have inspired many imitations by major writers of lyric poetry. Robert Burns collected and edited Scottish folk songs, restored or rewrote them, and imitated them in his own songs. His "A Red, Red Rose" and "Auld Lang Syne," for exam-