Tropes and Schemes

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TROPES

Tropes are figures of speech with an unexpected twist in the *meaning* of words.

Metaphor—When something *is* something else: *the ladder of success* (i.e, success is a ladder). *"The office is a bee-hive of activity on Mondays."* Or recall the old anti-drug commercial: "*This is your brain on drugs."*

Simile—When something is *like* something else: *"Her skin was like alabaster." "He was as unpleasant as a wart."*

Metonymy—Using a vaguely suggestive, physical object to embody a more general idea: CROWN for royalty; the PEN is mightier than the SWORD. *"If we cannot strike offenders in the heart, let us strike them in the wallet."*

Synecdoche—Using a part of a physical object to represent the whole object: *"Twenty eyes watched our every move"* (i.e., ten people watched our every move). *"A hungry stomach has no ears"* (La Fontaine). *"All hands on deck!"*

Puns (Paronomasia)—A pun twists the meaning of words, often to create a humorous effect.

Homonymic Puns—"Johnny B. Good" is a pun for "Johnny be good."

Sound similarities—*"Casting perils before swains"* (instead of "pearls before swine"). Puns have been frequently called "the lowest form of humor." Still, even Shakespeare uses puns. For instance, *Romeo and Juliet* includes a famous pun uttered by Mercutio as he is dying: *"Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man"* (3.1.97-98).

Zeugma—Artfully using one verb with two or more different objects. If this changes the verb's initial meaning, the zeugma is sometimes called **syllepsis**: *"If we don't hang together, we shall hang separately" (Ben Franklin). "The queen of England sometimes takes advice in that chamber, and sometimes tea." ". . . losing her heart or her necklace at the ball" (Alexander Pope). "She exhausted both her audience and her repertoire."*

Personification—Giving human qualities to inanimate objects: *"The ground thirsts for rain; the wind whispered secrets to us."* **Prosopopeia** (also spelled **prosopopoeia**) is a form of powerful personification in which an inanimate object gains the ability to speak. For instance, the Anglo-Saxon poem, "Dream of theRood" has the wooden cross verbally describe the death of Christ from its own viewpoint. Eco critical writers might describe clear-cutting from the viewpoint of the tree. Used car salesmen might write an advertisement from a car's viewpoint.

Apostrophe—Addressing someone or some personified abstraction that is not physically present: *"Oh, Death, be not proud"* (John Donne). Isaac Asimov might begin an essay on progress by writing, *"Ah, Mr. Einstein, you would be pleased to see how far we have progressed in science."*

Erotema—Asking a rhetorical question to the reader as a transition or as a thought-provoking tool before proceeding. *"What should honest citizens do?"*

Onomatapoeia—Words that sound like what they mean. For example, *Buzz; Click; Rattle; Clatter; Squish; Snap, Crackle, and Pop; Grunt.*

Hyperbole—Exaggeration: *"His thundering shout could split rocks." Or, "Yo' mama's so fat . . ."*

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Meiosis—Understatement (opposite of exaggeration): *"I was somewhat worried when the psychopath ran toward me with a chainsaw."* (i.e., I was terrified).

Litotes (especially popular in Old English)—is a type of *meiosis* in which the writer uses a statement in the negative to create the effect: *"You know, Einstein is not a bad mathematician."* (i.e., Einstein is a g oo d mathematician.)

Anthimeria—Using a different part of speech to act as another, such as a verb for a noun, or a noun for a verb, or an adjective as a verb, etc.: " *Gift him with Sports Illustrate d magazine for Christmas*" (as opposed to give him). "*he sang his didn't, he danced his did*." (e. e. cummings) "*I am going in search of the great perhaps*" (Rabelais).

Catachresis—A completely impossible figure of speech. For instance: *"The tears falling from her eyes were so sad they too began to cry with her." "Joe will have kittens when he hears this!*" It is closely related to ***hyperbole*** and sometimes ***synaesthesia***. Or as Milton so elegantly phrased it, catachresis is all about "blind mouths."

Synæsthesia—(also spelled *synesthesia*) Mixing one type of sensory input with another in an impossible way, such as speaking of how a color sounds, or how a smell looks: *"The scent of the rose rang like a bell through the garden." "I caressed the darkness with cool fingers."*

Aporia—Talking about not being able to talk about something: *"I can't tell you how often writers use aporia!" "It is impossible for me to describe how horrible it was to view the pink, runny mass."*
Aposiopesis—Breaking off as if unable to continue: *"The fire surrounds them while—I cannot go on."*

Oxymoron (plural ***oxymora***, also called **paradox**)—Using contradiction in a manner that oddly makes sense: *"Without laws, we can have no freedom."* Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* also makes use of a famous oxymoron: *"Cowards die many times before their deaths"* (2.2.32). The Bible itself contains many a paradox: *"He that would save his life must lose it; and he that would lose his life will save it"* (Mark 8:35).

SCHEMES

Schemes are figures of speech that deal with word order, syntax, letters, and sounds, rather than the meaning of words.

Parallelism—When the writer establishes similar patterns of grammatical structure and length. For instance, *"King Alfred tried to make the law clear, precise, and equitable."* The previous sentence has parallel structure in use of adjectives. However, the following sentence does not use parallelism: *"King Alfred tried to make clear laws that had precision and were equitable."* If the writer uses two parallel structures, the result is **isocolon parallelism**: "*The bigger they are, the harder they fall."* If there are three structures, it is **tricolon parallelism**: *"That government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."* Or, as one student wrote, *"Her purpose was to impress the ignorant, to perplex the dubious, and to startle the complacent."* You can also combine parallel structures in unique ways. For instance, you might have isocolon parallelism in individual lines that are further built upon in tricolon pattern. Shakespeare used this device to good effect in *Richard II* when

> King Richard laments his unfortunate position:
> *I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,*
> *My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,*
> *My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,*
> *My figured goblets for a dish of wood . . . . (3.3.170-73).*

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Antithesis (plural: antitheses)—Contrary ideas expressed in a balanced sentence. It can be a contrast of opposites: *"Evil men fear authority; good men cherish it."* Or it can be a contrast of degree: *"One small step for a man, one giant leap for all mankind."*

Anastrophe—Inverted word order from what one expects: *"One ad does not a survey make."*

Antimetabole—(also called **Epanados**) Repetition in reverse order: *"One should eat to live, not live to eat."* Or, *"You like it; it likes you."* The witches in that Scottish play chant, *"Fair is foul and foul is fair."* Antimetabole often overlaps with ***chiasmus***, below.

Chiasmus—Taking parallelism and deliberately turning it inside out, creating a "crisscross" pattern: *"By day the frolic, and the dance by night."* "*Naked I rose from the earth; to the grave I fall clothed."*

Alliosis—Presenting alternatives in a balanced manner: *"You can eat well or you can sleep well."*

Ellipsis—Omitting a word implied by the previous clause: *"The European soldiers killed six of the remaining villagers, the American soldiers, eight."*

Asyndeton—Using no conjunctions to create an effect of speed or simplicity: *Veni. Vidi. Vici*. *"I came. I saw. I conquered."* (As opposed to "I came, and I saw, and then I conquered.") *Been there. Done that. Bought the tee-shirt.*

Polysyndeton—Using many conjunctions to achieve an overwhelming effect: "This term, I am taking biology and English and history and math and music and physics and sociology."

Climax (also called **Auxesis** and **Crescendo**) -- Arrangement in order of increasing importance: *"Let a man acknowledge his obligations to himself, his family, his country, and his God."* The opposite is called anticlimax or **bathos** (not to be confused with *pathos*). In *bathos* (usually used humorously) the least important item appears anticlimactically in a place where the reader expects something grand or dramatic. Example: *"Usama bin Laden is wanted dead or alive for mass murder, international arms smuggling, conspiracy against the United States, and two unpaid parking tickets." "I will do my best for God, for country, and for Yale."*

Schemes that Break the Rules: How to Misspell Words and Ignore Grammar Like a Pro

Enallage—Intentionally misusing grammar to characterize a speaker or to create a memorable phrase. Boxing manager Joe Jacobs, for instance, became immortal with the phrase, *"We was robbed!"* Or, *"You pays your money, and you takes your choice."*

Anapodoton—Deliberately creating a sentence fragment by the omission of a clause: *"If only you came with me!"* If only students knew what *anapodoton* was! Good writers never use sentence fragments? Ah, but they can. And they do. When appropriate.

Tmesis—Intentionally breaking a word into two parts for emphasis: *"I have but two words to say to your request: Im Possible."*

Metaplasmus—Misspelling a word to create a rhetorical effect. To emphasize dialect, one might spell dog as *dawg*. To emphasize that something is unimportant, we might add *–let* or *–ling* at the end of the word, referring to a deity as a *godlet*, or a prince as a *princeling*. To emphasize the feminine nature of something normally considered masculine, try adding *-ette* to the end of the word. To modernize something old, the writer might turn the Greek god Hermes into the *Hermenator*. Austin Powers renders all things *shagedelic*. The categories

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following this entry are subdivisions of *metaplasmus*:

Prosthesis—Adding an extra syllable or letters to the beginning of a word: "*All alone, I beweep my outcast state*." *I was all a frightened by the use of prosthesis.* Prosthesis creates a poetic effect, turning a run-of-the-mill word into something novel.

Epenthis (also called infixation)—Adding an extra syllable or letters in the middle of a word. Shakespeare might write, *"A visitating spirit came last night"* to highlight the unnatural status of the visit. More prosaically, Ned Flanders from *The Simpsons* might say, "Gosh-diddly-darn-it, Homer."

Repeating Yourself: When Redundancy Is Not Redundant

Alliteration—Repetition of a consonant in multiple words: *buckets of big blue berries*. If the first letters are the consonants that alliterate, the technique is often called **head rhyme**.

Assonance—Repetition of vowel sounds*: refresh your zest for living*. Often assonance can lead to outright rhymes.

Anaphora—Repetition of beginning clauses. For instance, Churchill declared, "*We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost shall be."*

Epistrophe—Repetition of a concluding word: *"He's learning fast; are you earning fast?"* Epistrophe which repeats ending sounds, but not entire words, is called **rhyme**.

Epanalepsis—Repeating a word from the beginning of a clause at the end of the same clause: "*Year chases year."* Or *"Man's inhumanity to man."* As Voltaire reminds us, *"Common sense is not so common."* As Shakespeare chillingly phrases it, *"Blood will have blood."* Under Biblical *lextalionis*, one might demand *"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life."*

Anadiplosis—Repeating the last word of a clause at the beginning of the next clause. As Nietzsche said, "Talent is an adornment; an adornment is also a concealment." Extended *anadiplosis* is called **Gradatio**. For instance, in *The Caine Mutiny*, the captain declares: *"Aboard my ship, excellent performance is standard. Standard performance is sub-standard. Sub-standard performance is not allowed."* Biblically speaking, St. Paul claims, *"We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope, and hope maketh man not ashamed"* (Romans 5:4). *Gradatio* creates a rhythmical pattern to carry the reader along the text, even as it establishes a connection between words.

Diacope (also called **Epizeuxis**)—Uninterrupted repetition, or repetition with only one or two words between each repeated phrase. Poe might cry out, "Oh, horror, horror, horror!"

Symploce—Repeating words at both the beginning and the ending of a phrase: In St. Paul's letters, he seeks symploce to reinforce in the reader the fact that his opponents are no better than he is: *"Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they of the seed of Abraham? So am I."* (2 Co 11:22)